Exciting Adventures

ARGOSY

WEEKLY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 8-2

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ARGOSY

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JOEL TOWNSLEY ROGERS

Pink Diamonds

He Dies, Who Steals the Devil's Jewels!

★ ALL-STAR ★ STORIES BY

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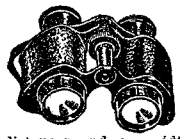
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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

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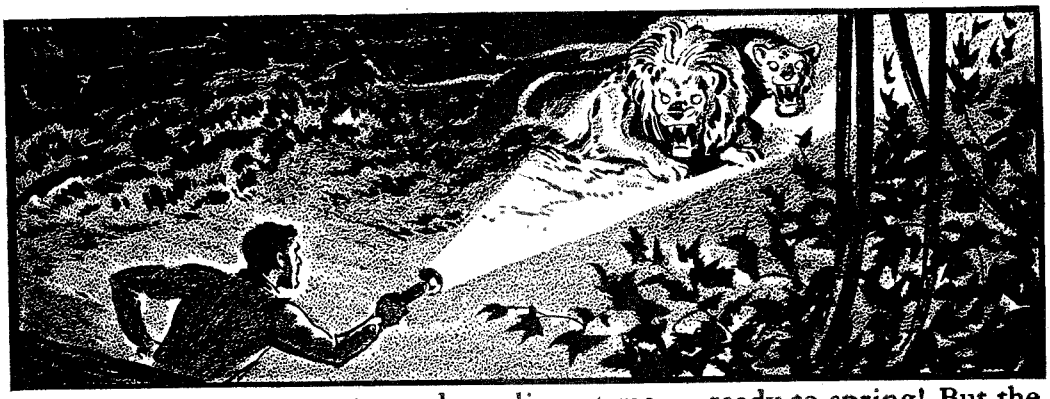
"THEN I HEARD A LION ROAR! It had followed the scent of the fresh meat! As I worked frantically to free myself, there was a stealthy rustle in the underbrush! I knew that death crouched in the darkness! Then I thought of my flashlight . . . switched it on . . .



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(*Signed*) *Charles "Tex" Stone*"

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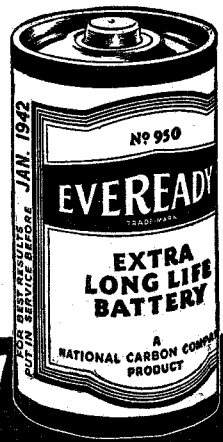
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Exciting
Short Novel

All she could do was crouch behind the counter. The gunman wheeled and fired

Pink Diamonds

By Joel Townsley Rogers

Author of "Blind Is the Night," "The Rubber Check," etc.

It was a story to hit every headline in the city. It was big, it was bizarre, it was a nine-day wonder. But the reporters missed the most exciting part—the strange and terrifying tale of how a mouse met and overcame a snarling tiger. So here's the part of the story you didn't read in your favorite paper

CHAPTER I

ON THE AVENUE

IT WAS ANOTHER one of those things. There was this diamond salesman who was taking a package of stones up to Barré Brothers on the ninth floor of the Oldfield building, on Fifth Avenue, opposite the big Wambleys-Fifth Avenue department store. He had them in a box in his old overcoat pocket in a striped gray paper bag that had come from the ten-cent store. But that didn't fool these guys. They knew what was in the package, all right, because they had probably tailed him.

There are always diamond salesmen carrying packages of gems around New York, carrying them as casually as cigarettes. You can't sell diamonds without showing them, and you can't go around carrying an armored truck with you in and out of stores and office buildings.

The only thing different about this particular salesman was that the diamonds he was carrying happened to have a great deal more than the average value. There were fifty-two of them, Golconda stones from India, graded from a carat up to a huge one of forty-one carats, all of a pale pink color, matched and perfect. His firm, Wittleheimer's, had been collecting them for a long time. And they were worth about anything you might care to pay for them, so long as you didn't start your bidding at anything less than half a million dollars.

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Barré Brothers had asked to have them sent over, as they had a potential customer for them, a rich oil man from Texas who was thinking of a necklace for his wife. The salesman's name was Jim Brady, and of course they called him Diamond Jim, though he was no relation, and he was an old man, sober and honest, who had been with Wittelheimer's more than thirty years.

He stepped into the elevator after a stenographer who was going up, and the elevator man started to close the doors, when a couple of other fellows pushed in. Some said afterward that there were only two of them, and some said there were three. The stenographer remembered only two, but she had been knocked on the head halfway between the first and second floors, and maybe she didn't have time to see all of them—she admitted that she had really looked only at the tall, dark, and handsome one of them, anyway. The elevator man gasped that there had been three, but he was lying on the lobby floor then, with his heart pumping fast away. As for old Diamond Jim, he never said how many, for they blasted him through the kidneys with a dumdummed .45.

They had got to work quick, in other words, as soon as the elevator had started up. It was *wham* on the stenographer's lovely little occiput from behind, while she was still painting her lips and casting artful glances at the tall, dark, and handsome one, and she went down with a quiet sigh. It was "Stop your car here!" to the elevator man, as he started to turn his head. It was "Give 'em to me, you damned old toad, quick!" to Diamond Jim. And then their guns were racketing.

Maybe he made an instinctive gesture to hold on to them; maybe he was just dazed and a split second slow. More likely they were just shooting crazy. The dumdummed .45 tore through him from behind, and they shot him again through the back of the skull with a .38 as they snatched the package from him and he fell. The elevator man had stopped his car and started to turn around, with each freckle like brown sawdust on his clabber-white face. They gave it to him just below the heart, without a prayer.

It was an old-fashioned elevator—hand operated. One of the gunmen reached for the lever as the collapsing elevator man sagged back against the wall, and sent it down again. They opened the door at street level, eight feet below, and they came out in a blaze of glory. The elevator starter was off duty, down in the basement for a late lunch and there were no passengers waiting to go up. There was only a cop who was just coming into the building then—not for them, because the meaning of the racket hadn't penetrated to his furry ears yet, and they were moving about as fast as the speed of sound. They came bursting out the car door and at him, and they blasted him with six slugs from four different kinds of guns as they rushed by and out.

THEY were crazy. They might have had a good chance to get away with it, even after all those murders if they had only calmed down, and had tossed their guns away and had started walking.

But the elevator man had stumbled out of the car after them a few steps toward the door, gurgling "Murder! Hold-up!", and maybe his voice had sounded louder to them than it was. And they had their guns in their hands, and when a man once gets to shooting it's hard for him to stop. There was the thudding of their feet on the sidewalk as they came rushing out, and they were yelling "Out! Out!", meaning out of the way, and banging off their guns.

Some said that there were only two of them, and some said there were three. People on the sidewalk dodged before them and screamed, and turned like ducks to run. They went racing out across the sidewalk and off the curb, finding their way on the sidewalk blocked by the crowds, and went darting across the crowded traffic of Fifth Avenue in and out between the squealing cars, with women screaming and horns blowing and them yelling and flashing their guns. The main entrance of the big Wambleys-Fifth Avenue department store, which covered a whole block, was across the street, and they went rushing straight across and up the steps and into it, with screaming citizens at the door scampering before them like mice.

It couldn't have been anything that they had planned beforehand. They were just wild to get away. The masses of panic-stricken citizens on the sidewalks prevented them from making their escape up or down the street. It must have occurred to them that the Wambleys-Fifth Avenue store went through to Madison Avenue, which was why they headed for it.

They didn't all make it in through the department store doors, though. There was one of them who stumbled on the bottom step. The traffic cop at the corner had left his post and came running at them. The cop had his gun out, and he was a trick shot with it. His shot went in one ear and out the other; the short ugly little thug wouldn't get up again from where he'd fallen.

"Get him, Ace! He's got Screwball!" someone howled, and on the top step of the entrance of the department store, with citizens running from in front of him and screaming, the tall, dark, and handsome thug—it may have been himself who howled—turned like a mad wolf with guns in both hands, throwing them on the traffic cop, MacGrady.

Bam! bam! and *bam!* There was a wolf grin of his handsome teeth as MacGrady's knees buckled, and with blood covering all his face and a black hole in the middle of his blue tunic the cop went down. Guns in fists, the murderer turned and went rushing on into Wambleys-Fifth Avenue, sprinting toward the Madison Avenue entrance the length of the store away.

"Out! Out!" he shouted, as the shoppers sprawled and stampeded in the aisles on every side. "Before I blast you! Tricks! Tricks! This way!"

Well, that was the score up to that moment, a diamond salesman and an elevator man dead, two cops, and one of the bandits.

CHAPTER II

THUNDER AFTERNOON

PRETTY little Mrs. Pauline Blodgett was one of the shoppers in Wambleys-Fifth Avenue that day. She was at the stationery counter in the center of the store, buying a desk set for her husband and some writing paper for herself, and looking at the new playing cards, when the bangs sounded on the sidewalk outside and at the door. With a thunder of stampeding feet and screams death came rushing at her.

Pauline Blodgett should never have been downtown

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shopping that day, or then it would not have happened to her. She had been feeling a mild touch of grippe, and she had promised her husband faithfully that morning that she would not venture outside of their apartment, but she had not been able to resist the lure of shopping. She was a cute little brown-haired girl, friendly, innocent, and somewhat naive, who was the daughter of a minister in a little town up state, and had come to live in the big city not so long ago as the bride of up and coming young Assistant District Attorney Tom A. Blodgett.

They had a nice little three-room apartment up on West End Avenue, with sociable neighbors, and she was learning to mix cocktails and play bridge, and be a New York sophisticate. She had a good distance still to go in all three directions, but she was happy. She loved everything about New York, and particularly Fifth Avenue with its crowds and great stores, and the thrill of buying little gadgets to furnish her new home.

She was there at the Wambleys-Fifth Avenue stationery counter making her purchases, and looking over the playing cards indecisively.

"They're very pretty," she said. "But eighty-nine cents is a terrible price, don't you think? I just bought four packs at the dime store for twenty cents apiece, including the tax. They may not be so pretty, but after all they're cards."

"These are very durable if you play cards a great deal," said the sales girl. "You're a bridge player, are you?"

"Not very much of a one," young Mrs. Blodgett confessed. "I am only learning. My husband thinks that I'm still the world's worst. He always sneaks out of the house whenever someone is coming in for a game. He says that he's got to see a man about a dog, but he's never brought any dog back with him, and I think it's just an excuse to go out and play poker. I always bid the wrong thing, it seems, and I never can remember what cards have been played or what trumps are. No, I wouldn't say that I am a bridge player. I am really a card shark."

"A card shark?" said the slightly amazed sales girl, looking at Pauline Blodgett's guileless, lovely face.

"Yes," she said with smiling pleasure. "I have a wonderful card trick which always interests and mystifies people who see me do it. I can name the suit of any card that you draw from the deck. It always perfectly amazes people."

"Mind reading, I suppose?" said the sales girl.

"Not exactly that," confessed Pauline Blodgett. "It's just a trick that I invented myself. Of course I can't name the number of the card. That would take too many decks. But even naming the suit always seems to everybody like magic."

"It really must be quite amazing," agreed the sales girl dutifully.

"It's my one parlor trick," she said. "But I think that everybody should have one, anyway. You never know when it will come in handy. Well, that's the writing paper and the desk set. I think I'll let the cards go this time. Would you please charge and send? They will be up today? I live up on West End Avenue."

"If you wish, madam, by our late special city delivery service."

"I wonder if it would be too much bother for you to send along my other little packages, too," said Mrs. Blodgett, with the aplomb of a charge customer. "I bought them at the five and ten, but they don't deliver, and I may be doing some more shopping before I'm through."

"Not at all, madam. Just leave them with me. Mrs. Tom A. Blogett, Apartment 4C, 1104 West End Avenue, is the charge, and the delivery is the same—"

The face of the sales girl behind the counter seemed to go star-white. Casting a glance to one side, she opened her mouth to scream. "Watch out" she cried, ducking down behind the counter.

IT WAS at that instant that Pauline Blodgett became aware of the rush of feet, the screams, the shots, all simultaneously. The figure of some man was rushing down the aisle. It went past her as she half turned with a breathless terror.

There were more figures rushing toward her, a horde of screaming, stampeding people, a tall dark blazing-eyed man with guns in his hands sprinting madly. She heard screams, "Stop him! Stop him! Murder!" And the banging of guns. "Out! Out," he snarled, as he rushed toward her.

It had all burst on her consciousness together. It was all happening with the speed of sound. She could not move. "Please" she gasped, with her hands pressed against her breast.

Her knees collapsed beneath her. She crouched on the floor in the aisle, huddled against the counter, with her head bent. "Out! Out!" gasped the tall dark murderer, rushing past her with sobbing breath, and the guns in his hands banged, and the screaming and the roar was everywhere.

At the Madison Avenue exit of the store, or maybe just on the sidewalk outside, a fusillade of shots smacked the ear almost as one. Tall, Dark, and Handsome had rushed straight through, but at the far door he had been met by four cops as he emerged, and their guns were leveled at his belly as he threw his own at them. He gave that half-scream, drowned in the roar of guns, and his look was twisted and frozen in its wolf grin as he flung his arms out sidewards and bent his head and seemed to dive headlong at them. He was about cut in two.

It had all happened in a couple of minutes, maybe in less than one minute, but people would still be arguing about it for a long time afterward. Some said, for instance, that Tall, Dark, and Handsome had started to run through the store, before turning swiftly and rushing back out to the front entrance again, with that bloodthirsty howl of "Get him, Ace! He's got Screwball!", when the ugly little thug following him had stumbled and gone down beneath MacGrady's bullet.

Some said that he had not yet entered the store, but had turned there at the top of the steps just at the door like a wild wolf, throwing them out at MacGrady. Some said that it wasn't he who had given that bloodthirsty howl at all, but a third one who had been with them—that there had been three of them.

Some even said that there had been four or five or half a dozen. But others said that there had been only two of them, and that the yell had come from some citizen, hollering in horror and excitement, and that what the citizen had cried had been, "Get him Ace! He's gone screwball!" Citizens sometimes yell insane things like that when they are agitated.

It was hard, in fact it was impossible, for police or reporters to reconstruct in every detail just precisely what had happened.

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There were guns scattered all over the sidewalks front and rear, and bodies, and people still running and screaming on Fifth and Madison, and some citizens getting pushed down and hurt, and then it was all over. But it was a terrifying experience for everybody while it lasted. It was no wonder that some people thought that there had been more than two of them, and maybe half a dozen.

IT WAS a pretty terrifying experience for young Mrs. Pauline Blodgett, who had been as near to the tall, dark and handsome gunman as anyone, or even nearer, and who had escaped by inches. If she had fallen in front of him, for instance, instead of huddling down against the counter out of his way, as he came mad-eyed, rushing, snarling, "Out! Out! Before I blast you!" She could very well feel that death had brushed her by, literally. That for a moment she had felt the sweeping of his coat-sleeve.

The terror of it still shook her as she picked herself to her feet. "Oh, my goodness!" she said. "Oh, my goodness! Did they kill him?"

"They must have," breathed the pallid girl who had arisen behind the counter. "Did you get a look at him? Eyes of fire! He had a gun in his hand! He was glaring right at us! I thought he was going to stop and jump over behind the counter! That was when I ducked!"

"He just ran past," said Pauline Blodgett, shaken. "With his glaring eyes. I don't think he even saw us. Snarling 'Out! Out!' And shooting off the guns in his hands."

"I thought it was the cops after him hollering 'Out! Out!' that way, and shooting."

"No, it was him. It was he," said Pauline Blodgett. "He had two guns in his hands."

"I only saw one, but that was enough! The way he was looking at you, as if he would devour you! And so silent!"

"No, he was thudding," said Pauline Blodgett. "I remember how his feet came thudding."

"I thought that was one of the cops, passing by," the sales girl said. "Believe me, I wouldn't have been out there where you were for a million dollars! He must have brushed you right by!"

"He did," said Pauline Blodgett. "Oh, my goodness! Oh, my goodness! All the policemen coming in. Will they have it in the papers? I'll never dare to let my husband know that I was here when it happened. He would worry himself to death, thinking how closely I had escaped."

"You're leaving your packages, madam. Oh, you wanted them sent," the salesgirl said. "They should be delivered this evening before eight. Will they have it in the papers!" she said. "A gunman in Wambleys-Fifth Avenue! Well, I'll say."

She gathered up the parcels on the counter to be wrapped for delivery with Mrs. Blodgett's purchases. Pauline Blodgett had already turned away, hurrying anxiously for a door.

Cops were swarming through the store with drawn guns. There were a hundred of them in no time at all, and every door was covered.

At the side exit through which people were being let out one by one cops and newspapermen were gathered. "Did you see him?" they asked Pauline Blodgett. She shook her head. It was not in any way a misstatement. She had not seen him. Just the impression of a rushing, mad-eyed, snarling figure amidst a stampeding throng coming toward her, and a bang of guns. That was after the salesgirl had screamed, and she had half turned around. There had been some fleeing men then who had brushed her by, but she had seen him even less.

"No," Pauline Blodgett told them at the door. "I just heard shots and screams and saw all the running. I didn't see him."

But she had felt him, yes. He had brushed her by.

The police sergeant in charge at the door looked at her and nodded, letting her pass. They couldn't demand names and credentials from every one of the thousand or two shoppers in the great store, and they were letting the women go, so long as they didn't look too much like gun-molls. Mrs. Pauline Blodgett was obviously an innocent, as well as a darling, and when she had no information to give the cops or reporters she was allowed to escape.

OR SO it seemed to her that she was escaping. From the rush of those pounding feet, from the madness of those glaring eyes, from the blood and sweat and horror of men who had killed, and killed again without remorse. Oh, she had been near death, as near as anyone who had been in the store in those brief seconds, but it was over now. Yet tonight perhaps she would think differently.

At the nearest telephone pay-station, two blocks down the Avenue, young Mrs. Blodgett stopped in and called up her husband at his office, just to hear his voice.

"Tom!" she said. "Oh, Tom darling!"

"What do you want, toots?" grumbled young Assistant District Attorney Tom A. Blodgett. "Has something happened?"

"No," she said weakly. "I just thought I'd call you up, Tom."

She wanted to tell him, but she couldn't. Perhaps it wouldn't have made any difference.

"Your voice sounded a little funny. I suppose it's your cold. You're staying in bed today, are you, as you promised you would? How's the flu progressing?"

"It's much better, I think, Tom. I just wanted to call you up to know if you are going to be home to dinner, or whether you've got to work tonight. The Smiths want to come over this evening and play some bridge with me, you know nice deaf old Mr. Smith and his wife who live upstairs."

"I suppose you are planning to show them your fancy card trick, are you?" said Tom Blodgett with a laugh.

"Well, I don't think they've seen it, and it's a very good trick," she said defensively. "I invented it myself."

"Listen, toots," said Tom Blodgett, "that trick wouldn't fool a seven-year-old. It's a comedy. So are you, if you think you know anything about cards. You don't even know yet how many there are in the deck, I'll bet you. All you know is that there are four suits. And it was to a guy like me, to whom cards are a beauty and a science, an art, a skill, and a religion, that you had to get yourself married.

"I love you anyway, toots. But you'd better get somebody else for your bridge game tonight. The Smiths have that pimple-headed nephew who lives with them. The one with the adenoids and the fish eyes. He ought to be

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a good fourth for the kind of game you play. I'd love to be with you honestly, toots, but I think I'll stay downtown and work late tonight, so long as you're having company. As the saying goes, I've got to see a man about a dog."

She could see him in her mind's eye, big-shouldered, square-faced, dimpled, sitting at the phone in his office and laughing at her. Winking, maybe, at his secretary or at some cop in the office with him. She felt quite inferior and helpless. Her big Tom was so much a man of the world, and he liked to tease her so.

"I don't believe you even know a man who has a dog," she said accusingly. "It's just your excuse to get away to play some poker with some of your horrible men friends, those men you call Bob and Tug."

"Well," he said, "I do admit that I like a keen close game in its time and place. But I like you, toots, in yours. Wait a minute, what's that? Holdup and triple murder in the Oldfield Building—"

His voice trailed off. It came back in a moment. "Sorry, toots," he said shortly. "Got a lot of business on hand here at the office. Call just came in on another wire about a nasty job in the midtown district. Jewel holdup and a lot of other unpleasantness. Gunmen rushing through your favorite store, Wambleys-Fifth Avenue. I'm damned glad you weren't downtown today. I'd have been worried crazy about you. You're all right, are you, toots?"

"Oh, yes, of course, Tom," said little Mrs. Pauline Blodgett weakly.

And she really thought she was.

CHAPTER III

THE GRAY MAN

SHE went out of the shop where she had telephoned, and on the corner she stepped aboard a Riverside bus which would take her up near her home. Two blocks up the avenue the bus brought her again in front of Wambleys-Fifth Avenue, and the throngs on the sidewalk were still thick about there, the cops were still at the doors, letting people out slowly. As the bus paused a minute or two in front of the main entrance, caught in the traffic, Pauline Blodgett pressed her face to the window, staring out.

"They think there may be a third one of them," she heard one of her fellow passengers say. "They're searching the store for him high and low. They haven't found the diamonds."

As she looked, she saw uniformed policemen coming out of the front entrance with two or three men whom they were keeping a firm grip on, a big tousel-headed fellow, hatless, with a dark swarthy face, a thin, shifty, red-haired man, and perhaps one or two more. But even the cops didn't look very much convinced that they had got hold of anybody.

A third murderer still uncaught! Perhaps there had been two who had gone past her. She remembered now that first figure drifting silently past behind her, as the salesgirl had ducked and screamed, and she had half turned from the counter. She had thought that he was only one of the terrified throng. But he had been so quiet of footfall and so silent of breath, now that she thought of it. It gave Pauline Blodgett the creeps to think of him so near behind her, brushing her with his coat-sleeve as he passed.

From somewhere among that little throng about the entrance of Wambleys-Fifth Avenue, in that moment she felt someone looking at her as she sat in the bus with her face pressed against the window. She could not identify who it was. Yet it was as if there was a threat in those unseen eyes upon her, a terrible menace.

The bus jerked and went on, and the scene faded behind her. It had not been the big, dark, sullen fellow whom the cops had hold of with a firm grip who had been looking at her, nor yet the thin shifty red-haired man. Just someone in the general scene. But it seemed to Pauline Blodgett now that she had caught a glimpse, as the bus went forward, of those eyes among the crowd. For the moment it seemed to her that there had been almost a red glow in them, a four-pointed losenge-shaped glow like the high card of diamonds.

It had been only some trick of the early autumnal sunset, of course, reflected from a window and into the eyes of someone in that little crowd about Wambleys-Fifth Avenue. If it had been anything more than her own creepy imagination. If there had been any evil in that look upon her, Pauline Blodgett told herself, the man who had given it did not know her name or where she lived, in this vast city of seven million people, where everyone is wrapped in anonymity, and she would not see him again.

And so she went on home, young Mrs. Pauline Blodgett, to her apartment on West End Avenue.

MEANTIME at Wambleys-Fifth Avenue the police were going through every floor of the store, and would be going through it for a long time to come. They had been at all entrances in almost no time at all after the shooting had begun. In time enough to blast down Tall, Dark, and Handsome as he had come bursting out of the Madison Avenue door. In time to have caught any other killer before he could have emerged, it would seem, if there had been another.

For there was still that confusion of testimony as to whether there had been only two, or a third one of them, who had come rushing from the Oldfield Building. But the general consensus appeared to be that there had been a third man who had run into the store just ahead of Tall, Dark, and Handsome, though no one could describe him.

There was the matter of shouts and voices, for one thing. That wild howl, "Get him, Ace! He's got Screwball!" Tall, Dark, and Handsome might have howled it to himself, but it didn't seem the most likely possibility. And even less likely that it could have been a citizen calling for ice. Moreover, Tall, Dark, and Handsome had gone rushing through the store afterwards screaming, "Tricks!! Tricks!" There were some who remembered that now, with all his other shouting. As if he had been calling to someone ahead of him, who deserved a tricky name.

There was the matter of the shouts, and there was the matter of the gun. Of the .38 which a stock-room boy found in the bottom of a canvas stock-bin not far from the Madison Avenue door. Since the tall dark thug had gone down with his big blasting .45 still in one fist and his neat belly-punching .32 in the other, it could hardly have been an extra gun which he had thrown away as

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he raced by. Particularly since the fingerprints had been wiped from it.

They let the women shoppers out, but they looked over every man, and held for investigation every one who was in the slightest degree suspicious, and perhaps some who weren't. They found Gorilla Maroni, who had just been released from Sing Sing, in a washroom in the basement, and there were people who had seen the Gorilla running down the stairs and ducking in there.

They found Red Helsey, who trailed with the Gumbo mob, up in the toy department on the eighth floor, and since he didn't have any kids, what was he doing there? They picked up a lemon-skinned, freckled mulatto hiding behind a shirt counter on the main floor, and he said that he had only come into the store looking for the employment office, but they took him along, anyway.

They even picked up a small, mild, gray-haired citizen who was standing behind a pillar not far from the Madison Avenue exit, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief; they picked him up because someone said that they had seen a man dart behind there. They detained all of those, and perhaps a dozen more.

None of them had the diamonds on him, though, and none, of course, was armed. There were no witnesses who could identify any of them, except that perhaps at some moment or another during the shooting they had been seen in swift movement. But who hadn't been ducking, darting, or dodging? There was no evidence.

IT WAS the fact that the diamonds were not found which weakened the conviction of the police that they had had the killer boxed in; for they knew now that there had been a third killer and that he had run into Wambleys-Fifth Avenue. The ballistics men had brought in their report that the .38 which had been found in the store was the same gun which had sent a bullet through the back of old Diamond Jim's skull and drilled the elevator man beneath the heart.

He had thrown away the gun, but he hadn't thrown away the diamonds, or they would have been found after not too long a search, like the gun itself. A flock of beautiful red diamonds worth half a million dollars, for which a man had done murder twice over. It was not in the cards, perhaps, that he would have tossed them away, no matter how hot and desperate his situation; with one chance in a thousand of holding on to them. If there had been time for him to have planted them in a secure hiding place, that would have been another story. But there were no hiding places he could have found in those few minutes.

As to the possibility of there having been a confederate planted in the store to whom he might have swiftly passed the jewels, that was ruled out by the circumstances. The break into the department store had not been planned. What had been planned, of course, had been to conk old Diamond Jim down, and the elevator man, and then go quietly out of the Oldfield Building and dissolve away in the crowds.

That had been the perfected idea. But few criminal ideas work out to perfection. They had had guns in their hands, and they had gone wild and shooting crazy. Only one of them, the brainiest one of them, of course, the one who had had the diamonds, had caught his breath somewhere in that rush through Wambleys.

Had caught his breath, perhaps realizing that the terrified people all around were not looking at him, but at Tall, Dark, and Handsome behind him. Somewhere there in Wambleys that third killer, the man with the diamonds, had begun to use his head. He had calmed down and stepped aside, throwing his gun away after wiping it. But not the diamonds. They had vanished, and so he must have vanished with them.

THE report from the FBI on the fingerprints of the two dead thugs didn't give any lead as to who that vanished third man might have been. The dead thugs had come from the West. They had been picked up here and there at different times over the country as vagrants, but there was no particular criminal record. They hadn't been tied to each other before, either.

"What are we going to do with these fellows we picked up inside of Wambleys, Inspector?"

"I'd damned near forgotten about them. What time is it now, half-past seven?"

"Yes, we've been holding them almost four hours. There're some of them getting a little impatient."

"Got anything on any of 'em?"

"No. A couple of them have records, Gorilla Maroni and Red Helsey, but this wasn't a New York mob. There's a lemon-colored smoke with freckles who was down behind the shirts. He was dressed in a bright green suit and a bright red tie and bright yellow shoes, though, and it seems as if somebody ought to have remembered him if he had been one of the killers running from the Oldfield Building. The rest of them are just citizens, not too well identified."

"We'll have them identify themselves and let them go, if the identification is all right."

The quiet and slight mild gray-haired citizen who had been found behind a pillar not far from the Madison Avenue door, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, waited quietly his turn to be questioned.

"My name is Charles J. Ross," he said. "I am an oil man from Texas. I am stopping in town at the Hotel Mordaunt on upper Broadway. Here are my car and driver's licences. Here are a couple of old letters I happen to have with me from my banker and my secretary. I imagine that if you telegraphed them they would tell you that Charles J. Ross is all right."

"How long have you been staying in New York, Mr. Ross?"

"About a week now. I motored east for a vacation."

"Is there anyone in town who could identify you?"

"Yes, I think so," he said. "I know Assistant District Attoney Tom A. Blodgett quite well, if you will let me call him up. Though I would hate to have him know that I am caught in such a ridiculous position."

"You aren't under arrest, you know," said the inspector, a little uneasily. "It was just a matter of asking you to come down town to coöperate, if you might have any information. Your name hasn't been given to the newspapers. I'm sorry we've kept you waiting so long, but the fact is we've overlooked you. Why didn't you say that you knew Blodgett in the first place?"

"I don't like to take advantage of my friends," said the mild gray man. "I haven't minded so much just sitting here thinking. But now it is getting late."

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"Of course, it's understandable that you don't like to involve your friends. If you don't mind calling up Blodgett, Mr. Ross, though, just as a matter of identification. I don't know if you'll find him in his office this late. Do you know his home address?"

The face of the quiet gray man from Texas looked singularly quiet and gray in that moment, thought the inspector.

"No," he said. "I've never been in his home. I'll try his office first, if you'll let me use the phone. If he's gone home, I'll have to think of something else."

"Think of something else than what?"

"Of getting him away—of getting in touch with him."

"Well, here's the phone."

The quiet gray man called up Tom Blodgett's office. "Hello, Tom," he said. "This is Charlie Ross."

"Charlie who?"

"Charlie Ross, from Texas. You've met me playing poker at Tug Corny's, the newspaperman's."

"Oh, yes, how are you, Charlie?"

"I thought I might organize a game at my place tonight, the Hotel Mordaunt on upper Broadway. Get Tug and Bob and some of the rest of the gang who sometimes play. Wanted to know if you could come around."

"Sure, you know me. I always like a good close game with Tug and Bob and the gang. My wife's having a bridge game tonight, and I wanted to duck it, anyway. About what time?"

"As soon as you can make it."

"I'm caught at my office here, but I'll be around. The Hotel Mordaunt, eh? Why, that's only a couple of blocks from my home. Right at the subway station where I drop off. Sure, I'll be there, Charlie."

"I'll count on you. And, Tom."

"Yeah?"

"Here's a guy here arguing that I'm not Charlie Ross. Would you mind telling him?"

"Why shouldn't you be Charlie Ross?"

"He says Charlie Ross was kidnapped down in Pennsylvania about eighty years ago, and has never been found since."

"Haw, haw! That a good one. Sure you're Charlie Ross, tell your drunken barfly friend. See you later, Charlie."

The little gray man hung quietly up. He turned to the inspector beside him, inquiringly.

"Playing poker with a D. A.," said the police officer, not without admiration. "I guess you're all right, Mr. Ross. Even if you weren't kidnapped down in Pennsylvania."

AT THE other end of the wire big square-faced Tom A. Blodgett sat smiling as he put his phone back down in its cradle. That joke had tickled him. Charlie Ross from Texas, he remembered him. That little gray fellow who had been at Tug Corny's the last time he was there.

They had played poker all night. A good keen player, and a tough one to read, whether or not he had the cards. Inclined to be a little wild and reckless in his play at times, but he always checked himself and pulled in his horns before he had gone too far. After eight hours at a poker table you get to know a man pretty well like that. At least well enough to call him Charlie.

Still, he had been put in the position of identifying, if not of actually recommending, a man whom he didn't know beyond that one meeting, Tom Blodgett was shrewd enough to realize. He had a genial and sociable disposition, but he was also very alert. A D. A. has to be cagey about people who may use his name for their own purposes. The fellow hadn't said where he was calling from. Tom Blodgett's face was reflective. He picked up his phone again before he had quite released it, and called up Tug Corny at his office.

Tug Corny worked on the lobster shift of an afternoon newspaper, and was still on deck. "Who's this guy Charlie Ross from Texas, Tug?" said Tom Blodgett.

"Ross?" said Tug Corny. "Why, he's a prince. A hell of a nice guy. Owns a big Cadillac and has lots of dough. Oil wells, I think, out in Texas. Did I ever tell you how I met him?"

"No."

"Why, I was driving down in Pennsylvania a week or two ago in my old jalopy, and Ross's car sideswiped me. Knocked my bus all galley-west. He had been going too fast, but maybe I had been hogging the road, too. It was in one of these little towns, and the local constable was going to lock us both up for reckless driving. I didn't have a cent with me, either.

"But Ross soothed the constable down with a half C note that he took out of a wallet fat as a horse's neck, and asked me how much my car had been worth when I started the old boiler act about suing him. I told him five C's, though it hadn't cost me but a hundred and twenty-five, and he peeled off the money and gave it to me."

"You're a crook, Tug."

"Sure I am, and I know it. But Charlie Ross is a nice guy, is what I mean. Most men wouldn't have paid out anything, they would have raised an argument and told me to go to hell first, because I had been some to blame, too, and his own car was dented.

"He gave me a lift on into New York, though he had a couple of hitch-hikers already with him in the back seat that he took into New York, too. Not every fellow in a big car with a lot of cash on him that way will pick up hitch-hikers, and I wouldn't have trusted those two mugs myself for a nickel. But he's a guy like that. I guess they grow that way out in Texas. On his tombstone they ought to chisel, *Here lies Charlie Ross, he trusted his fellow men.* He's a prince, is what I mean. He showed me pictures of his daughter and his boat that he had got with him, and his big place out in Texas. And, boy, is she a honey. The daughter, I mean. Why do you ask about him?"

"He's organizing a poker game at his hotel this evening. He wants us to come around. I guess he'll call you up."

"Suits me well enough. I'm feeling as lucky now as I ever do."

Tom Blodgett cut the connection, and called his home.

"Hi, toots," he said. "Still at it. Don't know when I'll break away. Enjoy your bridge game and your card tricks, and get to bed early. I may stop off for a little poker game with the boys before I come home."

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"With that Tug and all of them! That means you won't be in till six in the morning, I know it!"

"Not later than half-past five, toots, I swear it."

"Where can I reach you, if I should want to?"

"The game is going to be at the Hotel Mordaunt, Mr. Charles J. Ross's room. Why should you want to reach me, toots?"

"I don't know," she said—and her voice sounded to him a little sad and desolate, and he would always remember it. "I just like to feel that I am always able to reach you, Tom."

"Well, you can call me there for anything," he said.

But she would never call.

CHAPTER IV

DIAMOND DECK

THE quiet gray man went quietly out of police headquarters, onto the street. It was late. They had kept him waiting hours and hours in there. But perhaps it was not too late.

He was only thirty years old, though he was gray, and it was not easy to control the vigor in him, the urge to run and run. But a man was always a fool to run, or to make any commotion, or to make any noise.

My God, they had had him! They had all been at the doors of Wambleys so quick, and running in and through the store with their guns, yanking and grabbing at everybody. And they had actually had him. Nothing to do but play it quietly. But that had won.

He would like to run now. Run, run! Faster, faster. Madly. But he didn't. He walked quietly. He even paused to light a cigarette, and toss the burnt match into the gutter beside him.

He wasn't being tailed. He hadn't thought that he would be. If they had had a thing on him, with two cops killed, they would never have let him get away. No, it was no cat-and-mouse. He was clear.

He had played it quietly, and his credentials had been good. But how near they had had him! He had just darted behind the pillar there in Wambleys, had wiped the gun and tossed it, and they had grabbed him with his handkerchief still in his hand. If he could get away with that, he could get away with anything.

He was glad that he didn't have his gun any more. He would never trust himself with one again, in his hand and banging. Banging and banging, and it made you crazy with the blood-lust and the excitement and terror, and you had to run and yell, and it was hard to stop. Oh, he had been a fool, with that gun in his hand, and those two other crazy fools running and yelling. But no more of that.

The things he had done best, he had always done the quietest. Like the time he had clubbed the Widow Clancy down in her kitchen as a boy while she had been spreading a piece of bread with jam for him, and had stolen her savings in the tin can behind the clock on the kitchen shelf, and her never opening her eyes again to look at him, or her lips to tell on him.

Like the two girls in the park in Chi. Like the old guy in the big Cadillac car who had given him a lift along the road in Ohio ten days ago. The old guy had been talking along about his oil companies, and about his vacation in New York when he was going to get away from it all for a whole month, and nobody was going to know where he was or what he was doing.

Then he had stopped to show some pictures of his home and daughter, and had never seen the sap which hit him and broke the vertebrae of his neck, it had been done so quietly. And where the Monongahela's shores are steep and wooded, in a bottomless ravine deep down off the road, he was lying now, and no one would ever find him.

That was the way to do it, quietly. Finish it off and hide the evidence. So smooth that maybe nobody would even know that a crime had been committed, and there would be no pursuit. It would be a good many weeks before people began to get worried back in Texas about old Charlie Ross. Long before that time he himself would have faded quietly out of the picture. Maybe by that time he would have cashed in on those rocks. Those great pink rocks from the job today. When a guy had them cashed in on, he could live like a king forever.

IT HAD been the next day, he remembered, after bopping the old guy and dumping his carcass, that he had given a lift to Screwball, who had thumbed him on the road as he headed on east in the big Cadillac; and then a hundred miles or so later he had picked up the Ace. They had been a couple of good tough babies. Ace came from Arizona, where two guns are in style, at least to hear him tell it. Screwball didn't even know where he had come from, and maybe better not.

It was funny how he got wise to the two of them giving the nod to each other in the back seat, to knock him off and cop the car themselves. He had got a kick out of that. Even a couple of guys on the make like them, guys who had been around, had thought he was nothing but a mug, a citizen. They had named him Tricks when he had tipped his hand to them.

Well, he had needed to have plenty of tricks today. It had been pretty awful. The way those two tough guys had been blasted down, and the cops even laying their hands on him.

Screwball and the Ace had been too tough and ignorant for him, he should have figured it when he first picked them up. They had thrown him off his base. They weren't his style. He remembered when they had been streaking through Pennsylvania, and he had sideswiped a car. Right in the middle of a village it had been, boxed in by a lot of traffic, no clear getaway at all. But even so those two birds had wanted to grab their rods and start shooting.

They had been that dumb. He had handled it in the right way, of course, smoothing down the hick cop at the scene, and paying off the squawking citizen whatever he asked, and inviting the citizen to take a ride along. Nice and gentlemanly like. He had had it in his mind, naturally, for them all to give the citizen a working over at some good quiet spot a little farther along the road, and dump him out somewhere on the Jersey flats.

He didn't know why he hadn't. Except that the citizen had turned out to be a newspaperman, and those guys have contacts. He had used his head, and figured it was better to string the citizen along. He had given the lay-off signal to Ace and Screwball in

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the back seat, with their mouths watering like dogs at meat. And it had paid dividends. This guy Tug Corny had felt obligated to him. Look at him, calling up a D. A. to play poker with him.

He was clear now. But they had kept him stewing a long time in there. Hours and hours, just waiting. If he had been a thumb-biter, he would have chewed his away, thinking of the Wambleys late delivery truck cruising all over the streets of Manhattan, stopping at this apartment house and that one, and maybe some dirty sneak-thief coming along and grabbing a package while the driver was making a delivery. That would be sweet, wouldn't it? Some dirty sneak-thief grabbing what belonged to him, grabbing those beautiful pink stones, and fading out.

But they always watched those trucks, when he thought of it. They had a system of helpers to deliver. It was only the time element that he needed to worry about. To get there before they had been delivered. At least before that brown-haired innocent-eyed dame with the clear, pretty voice had opened the package, and opened her mouth and squawked.

It was funny, he hadn't figured her as the wife of Tom Blodgett, the D. A., when he had heard her give her name and address, and the sales girl mechanically repeating it, in that moment as he came running frantically along the aisle. He hadn't really thought about it till the big gold-shielded cop back there had asked him if he knew Blodgett's home address. That was a honey. Killing two birds with one stone. Killing. . . .

It was late. He must run. No, not run, but move with unobtrusive speed. Move fast, and move surely, and get those stones.

HE STOPPED in a cigar store at the subway corner, and phoned the night number of Wambleys-Fifth Avenue. "This is A. B. Trix," he said, speaking the first name that came into his head. "I live up on West End Avenue. I ordered some goods from your store this afternoon to be delivered today. About what time can I expect them?"

"You live where, Mr.—?"

He thought the voice sounded alarmed.

"Hicks," he said. "H-i-c-k-s. I live on West End."

"I thought at first you said your name was Tricks. I guess we're all a little excited around here. There was a holdup—"

"Yeah, I read about it in the papers. About what time?"

"Why, you ought to expect them any time, if they were going on the special late city delivery. If they were promised for today, they will certainly be there. Wambley-Fifth Avenue prides itself on its service. However, if you care to wait, I can look up your sales record and make sure—"

"Never mind," he said.

He called up the *Evening Globe* then, and got Tug Corny there. "Charlie Ross speaking," he said. "I'm organizing a game at my place tonight."

"Yeah, Tom Blodgett called me up and told me. I'll be there, Charlie."

"Call up Bob and what's that guy's name and the rest of them for me, will you, Tug? You know all their names and addresses. All them—those guys that I met at that last poker party of yours I was at."

"Sure, I'll get the gang, Charlie. As many as I can on such short notice. What's the matter with you? You sound all hot and bothered."

"I got a jane here with me, Tug."

"Well, maybe you aren't bothered."

"They never bother me."

"Get him ice!" said the newspaperman on the phone, laughing. "He's gone screwball."

"What's that you said?" asked the quiet gray killer.

"That's a new gag that's just started going around the town, Charlie. You haven't heard it yet? There was a big stickup on Fifth Avenue this afternoon, you see, couple of citizens killed, two cops shot down, holdup guys running everywhere. They got two of them, but the cops are still looking for another.

"The gag is this—that in the midst of all the excitement somebody hollered something that sounded like 'Get him, Ace! He's got Screwball!' But some of them claim that what was really hollered was only, 'Get him ice! He's gone screwball!' So it's a kind of new gag that's starting, see, Charlie? Every time a guy sounds a little agitated, you are supposed to say that to him, and it's supposed to get a laugh. We're going to start a *Get Him Ice!* column in the paper tomorrow, with five dollars for the best *Get Him Ice* gags contributed. It ought to be good for a week."

"I'll get the ice, all right," said the quiet gray man.

"He's gone screwball," said Tug Corny happily. "See you later, Charlie."

The quiet gray killer went out. Newspapers stacked on the subway newsstand had big headlines. Smeared clear across the pages in big black type, bigger than the war in Europe.

Deck of Diamonds Stolen! said the various headlines. *All Pink Deck Vanishes in Bloody Holdup on 5th Avenue! Six Men Die in Battle over Vanished Quadruple Flush.* And one, more succinct and grimmer, *52 Diamonds, 6 Spades.*

The fact that there had happened to be precisely fifty-two of the beautiful pink Golconda stones in old Diamond Jim's priceless package had struck the imagination of all headline writers, of course. The Diamond Deck, the stolen vanished stones were already being called. So another nonsensical phrase had been born out of that bloody horror of the afternoon on Fifth Avenue to spread swiftly through the town.

The Diamond Deck. . .

CHAPTER V

A QUIET WAY IS BEST

PAULINE BLODGETT cut the cord and tore open the heavy outer wrapping paper of the package which had just been delivered from Wambleys-Fifth Avenue. Inside there was corrugated board, and inside that, neatly packed and stowed away, the purchases which she had made at Wambleys, together with those from the five and ten which she had left to be delivered.

The uniformed deliveryman had rung her bell a moment ago and had passed the package hastily to her at the door, with an inquiring, "Mrs. Blodgett?" She had brought the package in and laid it on her living room couch to open it. She took one of the gray-striped envelopes out

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of the wrappings which she had half ripped apart. That must be the four packs of playing cards which she had bought in the dime store.

Her bridge table was set up in the living room, ready for the arrival of deaf old Mr. and Mrs. Smith and their fish-eyed, adenoidal nephew. They were not due for twenty minutes yet, but she had felt a little nervous and lonely, and had set up the table and chairs around it, and laid out score card and pencil. It made it seem less lonely in the small quiet apartment; even the empty chairs helped. The clock ticked on the mantle.

She went into the bathroom and got from the cabinet one of Tom's old razor blades, and then in her little kitchenette in the cupboard above the sink she found the mucilage jar. She sat down at the bridge table with them, and dumped the cards out from their envelope onto the table.

Carefully, bending her brown head, she shaved under the government seals on each pack, and opened the cardboard containers. She removed the inner glassine wrappings with the same care. Setting the jokers aside, she sorted the packs face up, and rearranged them. She then turned them over, and with the bridge pencil marked each card delicately on its back.

Having done so, she re-inserted the packs in their glassine wrappers, with their jokers, and with a tiny touch from the rubber lip of the mucilage jar she sealed up the wrappers again, and restored them to their boxes. With the same care she glued down the government stamps again.

She was committing a criminal act, though in her innocence she didn't know it. Also an immoral and highly unethical one. Marking cards for any purpose is never excusable, and well-brought up people don't do it even as a joke, any more than they practice copying other people's signatures.

Pauline Blodgett, however, had not been well-brought up in respect to cards. She had no understanding of the ethics of them, any more than of how to play them. She didn't know, in fact, that there was anything which could be called either ethical or unethical about cards. She had always been taught that they were an invention of the Devil anyway, and that just to handle them or even look at them was in itself a sin. And so when one is dealing with the Devil it doesn't seem to make it any worse to paint him with a few spots.

She didn't understand anything about card games, and she never would. But she had married a man who loved them, who had a keen instinct for them, and who seemed to judge people and to hold them in respect or contempt, by the way they played cards. She wanted earnestly to understand them herself and be a brilliant card player, so that her big Tom would look at her with admiration and respect, and treat her somewhat less like an idiot child.

They were, however, still pretty much all Greek to her. There were, of course, those, those four different kinds of funny markings that cards had, some black and some red, and those were called the suits. She knew that much about them. Then in addition there were different numbers on them, or else pictures, the aces which had one spot on them, and the other cards which might have anywhere from two up to nine or eleven spots, and kings and queens and jacks and knaves, and she didn't know quite how many else.

And people seemed to get excited about them. One kind of card was worth more than another, or one was worth less, and then you won or lost the game. It was all very complicated and incredible. She would never get all the numbers in her head. But she had learned the different suits.

THE only acual experience which she had had with cards before she had married Tom Blodgett had been in watching a magician once at a children's party who had pulled cards out of his hat and out of his trouser's cuffs and the back of his neck, and then had pulled a whole pack out of her hair, which had made all the other children laugh at her. (She was thinking of childhood days tonight, she didn't know quite why, but she felt a little desolate and sad and lonely, listening to the clock tick.) And then he had asked everybody to select a card, and without looking at it he had told them just what card it was.

It had all been very wonderful. One of the memorable events of her childhood, which hadn't been very replete with parties and good times. So cards were still associated in her mind with magic, even more than with games. And so she had invented, as she thought, now that she was married to her big Tom and was allowed to have cards in the house, this perfectly marvelous and mysterious trick of asking people to take a card, and then telling them what it was. Not the number, of course; she got the numbers all mixed up. But anyway, the suit.

She liked to show off her little trick before a bridge game. It always amazed and mystified people. Anyway, they always expressed polite surprise. Then if she didn't play a very good game afterward, they would still not have such a bad opinion of her, because she had showed them such a clever trick.

She was such an innocent, young Mrs. Tom A. Blodgett. Big smart keen men like Tom Blodgett generally manage to draw that kind in the lottery. And it's fun to have them and to love them and to tease them. But God knows a man ought to take care of them, too.

"Now," she said aloud with a pretty smile, laying the restored decks out on the table, one before each place, including her own, and speaking as if the others were already there, "now perhaps before we begin to play you would like me to show you a little card trick. You would? All right. I'll see if I can do it.

"Now, Mr. Smith, would you pick up the deck in front of you, and shuffle the cards thoroughly, please, and cut them three or four times? That's right, give them a good shuffle. Now cut them. Cut them again. Now select a card, any card, it doesn't matter which. Look at it, but don't tell me. I am going to try to tell what suit it is."

She pressed her hands to her temples, with an air of concentration. "Spade!" she said. "Is that right? Yes, spade it is, I see, Mr. Smith. Now which other one of you would like to have me try to guess a card? You, Mrs. Smith, or you, Eggleston? All right, Mrs. Smith, you shuffle—"

The clock ticked. It helped her to pass the time to practice her innocent little trick. Her big Tom always laughed at it as if his sides would burst, but it did fool a lot of people. At least they pretended that it did.

The elevator stopped in the corridor outside, with a

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soft, muffled thud of doors. She started, she didn't know just why. She looked toward the door, waiting and listening, with her lips half parted. But it was someone going to another apartment on the floor. Not for her.

"Now, Eggleston," she said, "I want you to shuffle and take a card, the way your uncle and your aunt—"

A bell rang.

THE front door bell, was it? No, the telephone, of course, just inside the bedroom. She arose and went to it. She picked it up from her boudoir table, a little breathless, with a hope. Perhaps it was Tom. Maybe he had finished his work at the office, and had decided not to go to his poker game, after all. Maybe he was coming home.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello?" said a thin dry creaky voice.

"Hello!" she said. "What number did you want?"

"Hello?" said the thin creaky voice. "Hello, is this Mrs. Blodgett?"

"Yes, this is Mrs. Blodgett! Is that you, Mr. Smith?"

"Hello, Mrs. Blodgett. This is Mr. Smith, your neighbor up above," he creaked. "I am afraid we shall have to postpone the bridge game till another evening, Mrs. Blodgett. Eggleston had to go out to one of his choir practices, he informed us at dinner, and that would leave us without a fourth."

"Won't you and Mrs. Smith come down anyway?" she said. "Just to visit?"

"Who is it? This is Mr. Smith, S-m-i-t-h, your neighbor, and I wanted to let you know—"

"Yes," she asid brightly, clearly. "I heard you, Mr. Smith. I thought that perhaps you and Mrs. Smith would like to come down anyway, just to talk. Perhaps you and she would like to have me show you my little card trick."

"You are going to a show at the Garrick?"

"No!" she said clearly, distinctly, taking a quiet breath. "I thought that perhaps you two would like to come down to my apartment and keep me company. Come down here. I am all alone tonight."

"Yes, some other night."

Oh, the deaf old man, with the buzzer at his ear! Why did people like that always insist on trying to use the phone, just to show how good they were?

"Please!" she almost screamed it, with a kind of desperation clutching at her heart. "Please, won't you come down? Tom is going to be away at a poker game, and probably all night, and it's so quiet, and the clock ticks so! Oh, I know that you can't hear what I am saying! But please let me talk to Mrs. Smith!"

"Yes. A sudden attack of the jaundice. Her sister called her up, and Mrs. Smith has gone to the drug-store to get some liver pills to take her. I didn't realize you had heard about it. Thank you for your sympathy. Some other night."

He hung up.

She pressed down the phone rocker. She dialed Tom's office number. But his phone didn't answer. She listened to it ringing a long time. He must have already left, on his way to his poker game. She put it down again, and left the bedroom. In the living room she paced up and down.

She went to the divan where she had left the half-opened package from Wambleys. They had done it all up compactly and neatly, the purchases she had made in the store, and those which she had left with the sales girl for delivery. She had taken out only the cards, which had been near the top.

She took out the Florentine leather desk set now, and unwrapped it. It would look very handsome on Tom's desk. Her box of writing paper, too. She took out a small, flat, gray-striped dime-store envelope. That was some dishcloths she had bought. Another envelope, a little lumpy. That was a pair of small gay blue china horses which she had got for the top of the bookcase. They had cost only ten cents each, but they were of a lovely periwinkle blue, and they would look handsome beside her copper bowl.

There was one more gray-striped dime-store package. She didn't remember that.

She looked at it. No, she couldn't remember it. She took it out from its nest in the corrugated board and torn wrapping paper, and turned it over in her hand a moment.

The white box came sliding out of the envelope. It was labeled *Wittelheimer's, Jewelers*. It had a hinged cover. She opened it. Opened it on that blaze of pale pink diamonds, lying in their cotton wool.

The fifty-two Golconda stones, as bright as white-hot fire.

THEY were bewildering to her. Sparkling in the light. Seeming to wink and breathe as they lay there. How they blazed! For a moment she didn't connect them in the slightest with the bang of guns, the scream and shouts, the stampeding people, the quiet shadow which had brushed behind her so obscurely in that moment when she had been standing at the stationery counter in Wambleys, midway in the store. She stared at them. They looked beautiful.

The doorbell rang. She set them down on the divan, half covering them under a fold of the torn wrapping paper. Still in a daze, she went to answer the bell.

There was the quiet gray man standing there. He had come in across the threshold before she could say a thing. Had closed the door quietly behind him.

She knew who he was, of course. In that instant. The smooth face, looking smoother because of the gray hair. The smooth tight mouth which had only a little twitch, at moments, in one corner. The pale, quiet eyes. She had seen him. In that moment as the sales girl ducked and screamed, and she had half turned around. But she had not noticed him. The big dark man with the two guns, thudding and snarling down the aisle amidst the stampeding people, had been the one whom she had been looking at.

She didn't know just how she knew him. But she knew.

"From Wambleys," he said in his quiet flat voice. "I am a package inspector. Checking over, we find we may have included an item too many in a package which was sent out to you. Has it been delivered?"

She opened her mouth. If she had not looked at it! But perhaps it would have made no difference.

"Won't—" she tried to say, "won't you sit down? I——will look around. I think perhaps a package may have come. If you will just wait a moment. I was just sitting here doing some card tricks. Perhaps you would like to have me show you one."

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If she could only divert his attention, keep him waiting, till she reached the phone! Tom had given her the place to call him up. Or if he had not arrived there yet, or if there was no time for that, still she could dial operator, ask for help to be sent, phoning from behind her closed bedroom door.

"Please," she said, "please be seated just a moment, and I—"

But he had read it in her eyes.

"Don't scream," he said in his flat quiet voice. "It will do no good to scream. Quiet! Quiet is the way to do it. Don't scream. I'm not going to hurt you. I know how it is, you want to run and scream. But it does no good. Quiet is the way to do it. Then nobody knows about it. I'm not going to hurt you. Just don't scream."

"I won't scream," she said childishly. "You won't hurt me, please?"

"Where are they?"

She pointed to the divan, where beneath the ragged edge of the torn paper, half exposed, the pink stones lay in their cotton wool.

He went to them and picked them up in his left hand, with his right still thrust deep in his pocket. He gave the box a gentle shake and looked them over, and closed it with a snap and stuck it in his pocket. He moved toward her quietly.

"You aren't going to hurt me?" she said breathlessly.

A shadow passed over his eyes. A red shadow. The same look which she had seen from the bus in front of Wambleys, when he had been coming out of the store entrance, quiet and inconspicuous.

"No," he said. "I'm not going to hurt you. Nobody is going to even know it. Quiet. That is the way to do it. Then they aren't after you."

"What are you going to do to me?"

"I am just going to tie you up, sister. Just tie you up. I used to be a bundle wrapper myself, and you're a nice little bundle. Just tie you up, and put a gag in that pretty little kisser of yours, so maybe you won't get too excited after I step out the door. You see, I brought the cord to wrap you up. That's all."

He had brought his hand out of his pocket.

"You won't hurt me, please?" she said childishly.

"Not a mark," he said, with that red ironical glance. "Nobody will ever know."

CHAPTER VI

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN . . .

HE PUT a handkerchief around her wrists, and wrapped the cord swiftly and expertly. She sat down, staring at him with her wide open eyes. A killer—murderous and bloody and without remorse. It must have been he who had struck down that poor girl with a gun-butt in the elevator of the Oldfield Building this afternoon, and cracked her skull, so that they did not know whether she would live or die.

If she screamed now, or tried to, he would do that to her. Or worse. But he could also be gentle. He had promised that he would not hurt her.

See how gentle he was, in his swift expert cording of her knees and ankles, with his smooth, long, quick fingers. Putting handkerchiefs around her first, and then the cords, tight and unyielding enough to bind her helpless, but not hurting. It was only natural that he could not trust her, that he must tie her, and gag her afterwards. He had his life, his terrible life, at stake. He had the red diamonds that he had killed and killed for. But he was gentle, in his own way. Almost a gentleman. He had promised that he would not hurt her if she did not scream, and he was taking care to keep his word good.

A murderer. With round eyes, breathing quietly, she watched his pale dead eyes, his quiet, tight, twitching mouth, as swiftly yet gently he bound her. But who was she to judge him? How did she know what had made him what he was? Perhaps something terrible had happened to him when he was young to make him bitter and warp him into what he was. Perhaps some injustice had been done to him by the guardians of society, by the police and courts, and he had been convicted and punished for some crime which he had never done.

Or perhaps he had suffered some great and terrible personal tragedy, perhaps his whole family had been burned up in a fire before his eyes, or some girl whom he had loved had died in a tragic way—something that had exhausted all his emotions and his human feelings, and left him what he was.

Her father, her sweet and saintly old father, a little strait-laced in his rules of living, but so simple, kind, and good, had often told her that there was good in every man, that even the worst of them have noble instincts, that even a mad dog, when kindly treated, will stop its snarling and its foaming and its frenzied biting and will lick the hand which offers it sympathy and help.

Look at him, the terrible gray murderer. He had said that he wasn't going to hurt her, and he had been so gentle that he wouldn't even leave a mark upon her skin.

"Well, I guess that about does it, sister," he said quietly. "That about finishes it, all but tieing your hands and feet together and jamming the gag in your pretty little kisser. Maybe I might grab a kiss off it first, too."

"I'll not let you do that!" she said.

"All right." He laughed at her quietly. "You don't need to try and scream. I just thought it might be a treat. I like them myself where there's something you can't quite read, and you're nothing but a nursery book. You're sitting there thinking in your little innocent sparrow brain how you are going to put the finger on me, aren't you? But you won't. No one is going to be following me. Nobody will ever know."

"I'll have to tell what happened, of course," she said bravely, "and describe you as best I can."

The ironical look passed over his eyes as he surveyed her. He didn't seem much interested in what identification she might make. "Well, fry me for a toad," he said. "I almost forget the nifty detail. How are those wrists of yours, sister—comfortable? I guess you can still write."

HE PUSHED the bridge table in front of her, over her bound knees. He took a handkerchief in his hand, and picked up the box of writing paper which had come from Wambleys. "Take a sheet," he said. "I almost forgot the receipt."

With a fingertip he pushed the pencil on the table toward her bound hands.

She didn't understand him. "The receipt?" she said.

"Sure," he said, with twitching humor. "I'm a package inspector from Wambleys, ain't I? And Wambleys de-

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livered those rocks to you, and I ought to have a receipt."

She heard the ticking of the clock, and his eyes smiled on her queerly.

He was a little mad, of course. But it was better to try to humor him. He had said that he would not hurt her, but she was not so sure. If she crossed him or opposed him . . . That murderous anger lurking just beneath, that fury which had struck down the girl in the elevator of the Oldfield Building. . . She looked at him with her innocent and childish eyes, and still she didn't know what kind of man he was. She didn't know, and she would never know, what it was all about.

He had bound her wrists very tightly together. And afterward, she understood, he was going to fasten them to her knees, so that she could not move any more. But as yet her hands were still free enough to pick up the pencil which he had pushed within her reach. No receipt that she could write would implicate her in the theft of the stones, or to exculpate him in any way from his murders. Perhaps it was a joke of his, his red ironic laughter. But it seemed to her really quite pointless and insane.

"What kind of a receipt do you want?" she said, a little breathless, humoring him.

"Like I say," he told her. "Write, 'To whom it may concern—' "

"To whom it may concern," she wrote, moving her two hands slowly.

" 'I was alone tonight—' "

"I was alone tonight," she wrote.

" 'And feeling kinda blue—' "

"And feeling kind of blue," she wrote.

" 'And no one else—' "

"And no one else," she wrote, hearing the ticking of the clock.

" 'Is responsible for this but me, and may God rest my soul.' "

"Is responsible for this but me—" she wrote.

She looked up at him, with the terror dawning in her eyes. She, who had been taught that even the mad dog is not entirely vile.

"But this is not a receipt!" she said.

He had the gag at her mouth, and he jammed it in as she opened it to scream. He pushed it back into her mouth, her throat, with force. She was half suffocated already. She tried to beat at him with her bound fists, falling backward in her chair, but he caught her wrists and held them, and caught her chair before it had quite fallen, before she could get a bruise.

He had not hurt her, no. Not a mark.

SHE lay on the floor, half strangled, staring at him with her horrified eyes, in the ultimate horror of her life. Quietly and swiftly, with those deft swift hands, he ran a cord from her wrists to her knees, binding them together. There was no movement she could make, no cry, and her breath was hard to get.

Still her consciousness must have been aware of the horor of it, to be still alive within the net, while that swift spider, gray as death, turned and wound her, round and round. To be alive and know, and hear the clock tick and tick, until her senses suffocated, and till she died.

He slid her trussed body into the little kitchenette, upon the cool waxed linoleum in the half darkness.

"Too bad, sister," he said in his flat quiet voice. "You'd put the finger on me if I didn't, and it's better to do it quiet. I'd have used chloroform or ether, but they're hard to get, and the docs are too damned wise. You just drift off to dreams. It won't be more than an hour at most. It doesn't hurt at all, they say. I said I wouldn't hurt you. You see, you hardly smell it."

Then he went ahead with what he had planned to do, saying no more because there was nothing more necessary to say. And of course Mrs. Blodgett was very quiet, too; she could neither move nor speak.

She must have been aware, in that ultimate horror of her life, with her half strangled senses, of the soft opening of the oven door of the little gas range in the kitchen, and the quiet turning on of the jets. Only that, and his quiet footfalls departing, and the soft closing of the kitchenette door. But for a little while, lying there, she would still hear through the closed door the ticking of the clock.

Sometime during the night, when the game was going good and the liquor was spilling free, and big Tom Blodgett was red of face and winning and feeling high, the quiet gray man thought that he would cop a sneak between the deals, and speed back and air out the little kitchenette a few minutes, and take off the ropes and gags and the clean white handkerchiefs which kept the rope marks from showing, and leave her lying peaceful there on the floor, after he had turned on the jets again. And even if she hadn't signed the note, there was enough of it in her writing to make it all look good. Even better and quieter than old Charlie Ross from Texas, lying stripped and dead in a ravine beside the Monongahela

He had closed the kitchenette door quietly behind him. An hour, at the most, in that small room, and it was now a quarter of nine by the ticking clock on the mantel. He moved softly through the living room, the quiet gray man, with his hands in his pockets, with the red diamonds in there. On his way past the bridge table he looked down with an ironic eye at the decks of cards scattered on it. She had been going to show him a card trick, had she? Show him, whom they called Tricks. A dame like that, so dumb she didn't even know she was alive, and would hardly know the difference when she wasn't.

He must hurry now. Blodgett and Tug Corny and whoever else they had been able to take up for the game might be at the hotel already, asking for him; and it might look funny if he didn't show up right away.

He hadn't been thinking too much about the game. He had just asked Blodgett to a game to have an excuse for calling the guy up, when he needed that buildup to get out of the trap they had him in. But then he had seen it as a way to kill two birds with one stone. Because when Blodgett came home red-eyed and happy from the game to find his love bird gone the gas route, it would just about kill him. Big smart guys like that go strong for these little dumb women, and it just eats them up. So much for Blodgett.

He remembered that he had even forgotten to get cards for the game. All that he had in his room were mackerels and strippers, and he would be a dope to try to ring them in on Blodgett. It might take him five or ten minutes to find a cigar store or a drugstore where they sold cards. The decks lying on the bridge table here were new. They must have just come in the package from Wambleys. He picked up one of the packs from the table as he passed by, and put it in his pocket.

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CHAPTER VII

GET HIM ICE

BIG TOM BLODGETT reached for the deck of cards on the table, broke the seal with his thumbnail, and tore off the glassine wrapper. With swift expert hands he ripped off the joker and rules cards, gave the deck a snap and shuffle, and with a flip of his big paw sent the cards sprawling out face down across the board.

"Cut for deal," he said. "Pick up a card and call it."

He took a drink of his highball, smiling at everybody, with his elbows planted. He loved this moment when he sat down relaxed and carefree at the game, in his shirt-sleeves, with a glass beside him, and a gang of good fellows. Downtown all day and often late at night he was the hard-driving young D. A., and he had to watch himself and be on his guard against a hundred different brands of chiseling.

But with the gang this way, he could take down his hair and relax and be himself and breathe naturally. Old Tug Corny, who had been his college roommate. Many a time in college before exams he and Tug and the English prof and their faculty adviser had sat up all night boning over seven-card Pete and spit-in-the-ocean together. Tug always claimed that his A. B. degree stood for Aces Backed. And old Bob Martin, whose old man owned seven banks, he was a great old bum. And Charlie Ross, Tug's oil man friend from Texas, he was a good guy, too. He was a quiet guy, and he was all right.

That was all that they had been able to assemble on such short notice. But four fellows can have a lot of fun together, if they are all good players, running rusty ones on each other, hooking each other back and forth, telling stories, kidding along, and with enough liquor to drink.

Old Charlie had a lot of good liquor he had brought with him in his big Cadillac clean from Texas. The colored boy had just come up with the soda, ginger ale, and ice when Tom Blodgett came bursting in on the stroke of nine; and Tom Blodgett had taken off his coat and vest and hurled them on the bed, and snapped his suspenders on his chest and loosed his collar, and had poured himself a drink and sat down to play.

The others had all only just got there. They hadn't even sat down yet. Old Charlie had just laid a pack of cards on the table—and Tug Corny hollers at the colored boy, "Get him ice!" And the colored boy sort of shivers and goes chocolate-brown around the gills. And Charlie Ross, gray quiet old Charlie, he says, "He's gone screwball!" quick, and just like that.

Charlie, he must be a lot older than he looks, because he's got a daughter twenty-one out in Texas, and that's as old as toots herself is, so he's old enough to be toots' father, although he doesn't look it. But quiet or not, he's always there with the latest gag.

"Get him ice!" says Tug. And, "He's gone screwball!" Charlie says, quick like that, and never cracks a muscle of his face. A new gag they're spreading about the hold-up. A terrible tough business, but you've got to laugh at something. It doesn't help the killer if you don't.

"YEOOWHOW!" said Tom Blodgett, snapping his suspenders on his chest and stretching forth his legs beneath the table. "I'm a two-gun man from the wild and woolly! Get him Ace! He's got Screwball! How's that for a wild wolf howl?"

"Pretty good," said Charlie.

"Well, pick up a card, and cut for deal, you cut-throats. Let's play cards."

"Two of diamonds," said Tug Corny, picking up a card and laying it down again.

"Diamond four," said Bob Martin, drawing for the deal.

"King," said Charlie Ross, on Tom Blodgett's right. "Diamond."

"Ace of Diamonds," said big Tom Blodgett, slapping down the card he'd drawn. "All pink, anyway. But it looks as if I win the deal."

"Maybe it's the Diamond Deck," said Bob Martin with a laugh. "You've heard the gag that's going around, have you? You go into a cigar store, or any place else where they sell playing cards, and you say to the guy at the counter—"

Big Tom Blodgett smiled dutifully, picking up the cards and giving them three rapid cuts and shuffles. He laid the pack down in front of Charlie Ross for the cut, and Charlie tapped them. He began to drift them out around across the board, with fleeting motions.

"And then what does the guy say?" said Tug Corny.

"He doesn't say anything," said Bob Martin. "He hasn't got the Diamond Deck."

Tom Blodgett laughed with the rest of them, though the fact was that he had drawn a blank in the middle of the story. He had been thinking of Pauline, his toots, as he dealt the cards swiftly and expertly around, he didn't know just why. Her loving affectionate little ways, her silly little brain. He really ought to have gone home tonight and done his duty by playing bridge with the deaf old Smiths. Only a guy got tired, hard-driving at the office, with all the crooks he had to deal with and the

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hardness and ugliness of life, and he deserved some relaxation.

Maybe he would lay off early tonight, though, instead of letting it drag out into an all-night session, and get home at midnight or one o'clock. She would be asleep long ago by that time, of course. But she would be glad to know that he hadn't stayed out quite all night tonight, if she should wake up.

"What are we playing, jackpots?" he said good-humoredly. "Dealer opens with a bang and the small sum of one buck. This gag about the Diamond Deck reminds me of this wife of mine. This dumb little wife of mine. She barely knows one card from another, but she thinks she has a card trick she's invented for herself.

"She takes four decks of cards, and she puts the same suit of the different packs together, making four new packs, all spades, hearts, and so on, and then she lays them out before the others at the bridge table and asks them to cut and shuffle the deck in front of them, and if they pick out a card she will name the suit of it for them. And when they do, she does."

"I don't get it," said Tug Corny. "I'll stay for a buck."

"Staying for a buck myself," said Bob Martin. "Where's the trick of it?"

"Might as well stay for a buck myself, if that's all it's costing," said quiet gray Charlie, riffling through his cards meagerly. "You mean she stacks the decks and expects to fool anybody? It sounds pretty dumb."

"YOU don't know my wife," said big Tom Blodgett, laughing. "She can think of even dumber. But that's not all, because even after stacking her four one-suiter decks she's liable to get mixed up on them, or forget them, so she marks the backs of each card with a light pencil initial showing its suit. She was a minister's daughter, and she's so guileless, that's the whole damned joke of it, that she actually thinks she's invented stacking decks and marking cards."

They laughed with him as he roared. "How many cards?" he said.

"Content with what you gave me," said Tug.

"Think I'll play these, myself," said Bob Martin mildly.

"Enough," said quiet gray Charlie Ross, looking with his pale quiet eyes around him.

"Well, something's hot and about to fry," said big Tom Blodgett happily, laying down the remainder of the deck and spitting on his hands. "To be fried for a toad, as Charlie says. Dealer also standing pat, just to make it even. A flock of pat hands all around the board, unless about three of you are lying. And just to keep you honest, dealer opened and is now betting seven bucks."

"Raise one," said Tug mildly.

"And nine," said Bob Martin, shoving them in.

"See," said quiet gray Charlie Ross, with his pale gray eyes around him, riffling the edges of his cards and holding them tight together.

"One and nine makes twenty-three to me," said big Tom Blodgett, "if I hike it just thirteen more. Somebody's lying like the hinges, and it might as well be me. But maybe I'm not kidding you when I say I've got 'em."

"And one more," said Tug Corny, putting them in.

"I'm only seeing," said Bob Martin, pulling in his horns.

"A hundred more," said Charlie Ross, definitely.

"Ouch!" said Tom Blodgett, not unhappily. "A big wham lying waiting. I thought somebody was lying low to make a hook when everybody came in for a buck with pat hands. Did some guy pull a full house pat to beat my poor feeble little straight? A straight is what it is, and I'm not lying. Well, fun is fun but money's money, and I'll not make it high. I'll do more than see that hundred, Charlie."

"Straight's no good," Tug Corny said. "I guess I'll have to see it, too."

"Same goes for me," Bob Martin said. "What are they, Charlie?"

"Flush," said quiet gray Charlie Ross.

"Same here," said Tug Corny. "Diamonds."

"Well, I'll be damned," Bob Martin said. "I've got a diamond flush, too. But mine's ace high. What suit is your flush, Charlie?"

The quiet gray man laid down his cards in front of him. He wet his lips. "Wins," he said. "I was just kidding all of you. I had a rusty one. Just nothing."

Tom Blodgett was breathing quietly.

"Diamond flush, ace high, win from you, Tom?" said Bob Martin, reaching for the chips.

"I've got a straight flush, Bob, that's all," Tom Blodgett said, breathing quietly. "A small one, but pretty good. Ace to five of diamonds."

"But that couldn't be. I've got the ace of diamonds myself," said Bob Martin.

He was a little slow.

"And there couldn't be fifteen diamonds, either," said big Tom Blodgett quietly, "to make three diamond flushes. But there are. Everyone has diamonds except Charlie."

THE small quiet gray man had his thin long hand upon the cards that he had laid down on the table. He had it planted. Big Tom Blodgett reached over, and took up the thin hand, as he might remove a clinging starfish from a stone, while Charlie Ross's mouth twitched painfully.

"Royal straight flush of diamonds, ten to ace," said Big Tom Blodgett softly. "And you laid them down, Charlie. What is the gag? Why did you lay them down, Charlie, when you found there were too many diamonds?"

The quiet gray man had slid his chair back a little. He was getting up from it. Tom Blodgett picked up the remainder of the undealt deck, and turned it over and flung the cards out across the table.

"Fifty-two," he said. "All diamonds. Pink."

The small quiet gray man was reaching for his coat. Tom Blodgett turned a card over, and saw the faint penciled *D* upon its back, amidst the scrolls. All of them, they had that faint *D*. So obvious and dumb and silly, like his toots.

Big Tom Blodgett was on his feet, too. "What were you doing in my house?" he said. "Where did you get those diamonds? Just stop. Just stop. Just answer me quick. Just answer me with a smart one. Just stop your damned twitching mouth, Charlie Ross from Texas, and think. Ah, you—"

The quiet gray man had tried to reach the door, but big Tom Blodgett, moving on his feet with speed and fury, was there and blocking it. The quiet gray man had

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his sap out of his pocket, and there was a bubbling on his lips and a bubbling in his throat.

"Out! Out!" he snarled. "Out of my way, before I slam you!"

He howled and swung his sap as big Tom Blodgett went at him. He howled like a bloodthirsty wolf, or a coyote crazed with terror. But Tom Blodgett had his hands upon him then, and Tom Blodgett had him slammed against the wall. He screamed, and Tom Blodgett's fist banged him beneath the ear, sending his head back; and his jaw went limp. Tom Blodgett's fist struck him again, before he could fall down, knocking a hole in the plaster loose where his head hit it, and he went down like water.

"Get him ice!" screamed Tug Corny crazily, with the ice pitcher he had snatched up. "He's gone screwball!"

And Tug really meant it, he really thought it, about big Tom Blodgett. He hadn't been quite so quick to understand that deck of diamonds. He hadn't quite Tom Blodgett's keen card sense. But the white box spilled out of the quiet gray man's coat pocket as he slid and sprawled there on the floor against the wall, and the great pink Golconda stones came spilling out of it, the other Deck of Diamonds.

He would be lying there with his broken jaw until they came and got him. And they would fry him for a toad. . . .

IF SHE had only told him! If she had only told him that she had been downtown today, in Wambleys-Fifth Avenue, when the killers had come rushing in, seeking their desperate escape. If she had only told him just how she had been ordering a charge and asking for some other packages to be delivered, in that moment as the killer who had the diamonds had gone brushing frantically by, seeing his escape cut off at every door, seeking a way to get rid of the jewels and yet hold on to them. If she had only told him that she had been there, his innocent, loving, unsuspicious, brown-haired Pauline.

Or if only he had watched over her a little better.

She had been in the little kitchenette a half hour, perhaps, when he had come in and smashed the windows out, and got her to the draft of cold autumnal air, pulling off the suffocating gag and cutting those bonds about her. The ambulance men and the utilities emergency crew, who were there within five minutes, brought oxygen with them, but she didn't need it. She was in her white bed in the hospital now, and she was all right.

"Tom," she said to him.

"Yes, toots?"

"I've thought of a way to make that trick of mine even better, though it would be very expensive. If I bought fifty-two decks of cards, and took out one particular card from each deck—for instance the queen of hearts—and put them all together, then I could call the card, too, couldn't I? Of course it would be a shame to waste all the other cards, but would they have to be wasted? Perhaps you could use them in some other games without the silly little queen."

"I don't want to play any games without my silly little queen," said big Tom Blodgett. "You're all right, toots."

THE END

Men Who Make the Argosy

Meet the Author—Murray R. Montgomery

THOSE rakehellies Cleve and d'Entreville (of course you're reading "Swords in Exile"!) cover a lot of ground; but in comparison to their creator they're a couple of old mossbacks. Murray Montgomery has been so many places and tried his hand at so many things that he sounds slightly confused by it all.

Maybe that's because he was born in Winnipeg, Canada, on the day Great Britain declared war on Imperial Germany. He says, a little wonderingly, "It was a case of enter Montgomery and commence firing!" During adolescence in New York and on Long Island, he tells us, "I developed a six-foot-one frame; a distaste for polo—the result of a lack of compromise between myself and the horse; and a positive lust for yachting.

"Books had always interested me, so I read prodigiously and after consuming such teen-age tomes as Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals,* Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason,* Plato's *Republic,* etc., etc., I decided to write something of equal importance. I gave my all to the literary world—and the literary world promptly gave it all back. I decided to become an artist."

At this point the record becomes a little breathless. From ten easy lessons in art he proceeded to trap-drumming "in a snappy little aggregation known as Kings of Rhythm." This particular brand of royalty appears to have been out of fashion at the time, for Murray quickly makes his second appearance as a writer (selling two stories out of twenty), then decides to become an actor.

Follow closely now. He gets a part in a play—and the play closes after a brisk two-day run. He becomes a salesman for the Royal typewriter company. Then he decides to write a play, but first becomes an actor again (the part he gets is in another turkey); takes a fling at producing for the Flushing Summer Theater; and goes barnstorming with a road company of "Let Freedom Ring."

"I lost ten pounds," he comments ruefully, "and a lot of enthusiasm. Returning to New York, I wrote my play. Because the Broadway producers seemed to regret that very much, I got a job as a reporter until the thing blew over."

Still with us? We're almost through. Watching corpses dragged out of the river wasn't quite to Murray's taste, so he gave up police-reporting and went to work for the scenario department of Twentieth Century-Fox.

"They had gotten hold of the play I had written and felt obliged to pay hush-money," he blushes. "Even so, I felt encouraged, so I tried my hand at writing again—and wonder of wonders, sold everything I wrote, with the result that I am still writing."

We like happy endings, and we like Mr. Montgomery and all his works—so there remains only to add a few hearty cheers and the statement that the Rakehellies' papa is now a full-fledged American citizen, resident in Great Neck, Long Island. No puns, please.

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Have You Ever Been Alone?

They rowed away and left him there on the beach, quite alone, with only the phonograph to speak to him

By Richard Sale

Author of "QRR," "In Action," etc.

When you read the memoirs of Dr. Nicholas Adams, Lt. Col. USMC, late of the Department of Infectious and Contagious Diseases, Rockerfeller Institute, you probably noticed his allusion to a brief stopover he made on the island of Cardinal Rock to attend a patient named John Hedwick. Unfortunately, he did not amplify upon this journey, which was one of the strangest he made in all his fifteen years of trekking the Orient in quest of pestilence. The facts are these. . . .

Man is not born for solitude, and loneliness can be a sorer sickness than any yet dreamed of. Yet here is the strange and stirring saga of a man who endured its punishment and still could dream of revenge

DR. NICHOLAS ADAMS was going home. He had been everywhere in the Orient from Japan, China and Malaya, to Australia, Batavia and New Zealand, in his work for the Institute, and as a matter of fact, he had sailed from Wellington in a leaky old steamship named the Dominic Luger. It was to be his first vacation in years, and since the ship had a port of call at Papeete, Tahiti, Nick planned to stop off for two days to visit with Latham Brooke, the novelist. He had saved Brooke's right leg during the first war, and thus preserved the gentleman for the purpose of giving us a series of esoteric works.

They were very good friends, had corresponded over the years, but had been apart from the day that Latham Brooke gave up the civilized life of Mayfair and migrated to Tahiti to spend the rest of his days in the tranquility of the islands. Brooke was an honest cynic, as his works show, and it was characteristic of him to leave civilization for civilization.

At any rate, when Nick Adams arrived in Papeete and saw Brooke, it was a happy occassion. Neither of them was disillusioned. Brooke had a home over on Moorea, and he ran Nick across the bay and they talked of many things.

When they neared the island, Brooke pointed out his home up on the cliffs, and Nick said, "That's a pretty ramshackle sort of place, Lath. What the devil do you do with all your money? I'd have thought, with your taste for the grandiose, you'd have built yourself a Norman castle on this headland."

"I know," Brooke said, "but it was a nuisance even to get *this* place built. Besides, I'm not as rich as you think. Speaking of castles, though, I know one that'd amaze you. Not that it's really a castle; it isn't. But it's a perfectly modern little place, with all the comforts of home, and it's just about fifteen hundred miles from anywhere. As a matter of fact, I think you're going to be interested in it."

"You think wrong," said Nick. "I see you've got some fine little scheme up your sleeve; and I say to the devil with it. I'm on my way *home*."

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"Don't be a boor," said Brooke. "You haven't heard the story yet, and as a matter of fact, the gentleman on the island has expressed a wish to see you."

"I can imagine," Nick Adams said drily. "Never heard of me in his whole life, he's fifteen hundred miles from anywhere, and you have a written invitation from him to me."

"I have, old boy," said Brooke. "Isn't that perfectly astonishing? Now look here. The name of this place is Cardinal Rock. Five hundred miles due north of Tahiti. The gentleman who lives on the island—it's British—is John Hedwick, who was a Lieutenant-commander in His Majesty's Navy during the war."

"I thought it was fifteen hundred miles from anywhere?"

"It is. Tahiti isn't 'anywhere'."

"You mean he lives alone on the place?"

"Practically," Brooke said. "He has two natives he hires to sail his yawl down here to Papeete for supplies once every three months. . . You see, Nick, no one else would want to live on the island. Its volcanic, and though covered with greensward, it is constantly having tremors. Earthquakes. The cause is a submarine volcano somewhere in the neighborhood building itself up for a major explosion someday. When that day comes, Cardinal Rock will vanish in the sea. It's just a small pimple in the deep, really, and I don't imagine many people would care to reside there."

"I wouldn't think any sane man would," Nick Adams said. "I never heard of the place. If it's that dot you have circled on this map in your hand, I don't see from its location how any ship would ever manage to pass there."

"SHIPS DON'T," Brooke replied. "For twelve years while he was on the island, Hedwick never saw a ship once. Not once. It is a very lonely place." He sighed. "I'd love to go up there."

"Why the devil don't you then?" Nick asked.

"Because Hedwick won't allow me to come, and one has to have his permission. Originally, Cardinal Rock was Danish. It was Danish when John Hedwick was marooned there. He spent twelve years alone until he was rescued one day by two American boys in a sailboat. They were crossing the Pacific for sport and stopped off for water. Storm had driven them off their course or they would never have put in. They brought him to Papeete. Are you listening?"

"Every word."

"Hedwick had been marooned in 1917, so it was 1929 before he was rescued. By that time, when he returned to England, he learned that his father was dying, and that he was to be sole heir to an estate of five million dollars. What do you think he did with his money, Nick?"

Nicholas Adams grimaced. "Spent it, obviously."

"Of course, you fool, but how? Never mind, I'll tell you. He bought Cardinal Rock from the Danes for two milion dollars—and *I* think he got stuck. Then he returned. A ship called, delivered the materials for this splendid little home he has there—I'll show you pictures. He bought his yawl, and then—almost like myself—he stepped out of the civilized world and retired. The hermit of Cardinal Rock. He took two Tahitians, Huako and Attu, with him. They were perfectly willing, of course."

Nick shook his head. "I would say he was not a *Ta'ata.*"

"Oh, but you're wrong. He *is* a human being. And don't use that expression in the islands, Nick, it's reserved for avaricious Chinamen who run the shops, who are owed something by everyone and owe everyone nothing. No, Hedwick is quite sane. He solved the riddle of his own soul in the twelve years he spent on the island.

"Cut it out," Nick said. "I deal in pestilence and pestilence works on bodies. Souls are outside the range of the medico. Get back to reality. How did he get marooned?"

Brooke shrugged and smiled. " You'll have to ask him."

"Why won't he let you see the island?"

"Ask him."

"Does he have a secret there?"

"Definitely," Brooke said quickly and with enthusiasm. "What is his secret, Nick?" I'd give a leg to know it. It didn't used to be there, for when I first got in touch with him, he was not unwilling for me to come up some time. That was last year. Since then, he's clamped down and forbidden me entry. But you can go."

"You're talking crazily," Nick Adams said. "How on earth do you contact a man five hundred miles across the sea, and how can I go? I'm going home. I'm going to have a vacation. I haven't seen New York in four years."

"It's noisier no doubt," said Brooke, offhand. "You really haven't missed a thing, old boy. Come into my study here, and I'll show you the machinations of the devil himself."

IT WAS a littered room, filled with books and instruments and gadgets of every conceivable kind. Brooke apologized, "Yes, that is where the money goes—trinkets. . . . Sometimes one gets bored, you know." He laughed. "But see this."

It was a radio transmitter in a tall copper-coated relay-rack mounting, the various panels studded with ammeters of different values, and tuning condensers and switches. It stood beside Brooke's desk on which was a microphone and a wireless key.

Brooke said, "This is how I contacted Hedwick. The name of my station is F08MU. This is an eight-hundred watt outfit, old boy, and I have to generate my own electricity for it, but I wouldn't part with it for the Kohinoor. I can reach around the world with my radio waves, transmitting and receiving. It's another dimension.

"I'll never get used to it. Short waves. Amateur bands, you know." He moved to a recording machine at one side of the room. "Now I'll play you your invitation. This transmission was made several night ago when I received your wireless that you were going to stop over here. I was on the air talking with ZC6JH—Hedwick's call letters—and told him you were coming, and this is what happened. Listen."

Nick Adams sat down, stunned by the implications of such communication. He had never considered what a need there must be for it in remote places. He watched Brooke put the recording on the machine. The needle moved into the grooves and the record hissed.

"Good evening, Brooke. Sorry to be late on our schedule but I was delayed getting to the transmitter tonight."

Nick Adams shivered a little. It was that sort of voice. At first sinister, but then not sinister at all. Just morose and sad. Pitifully sad. It was the comical bassoon gone tragic in its lowest register. That was why it raised the hackles on his neck a little. It was the voice of a man contemplating suicide.

From then on this dialogue followed: ***"That's all right, old man. How is my signal?"***

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"Your signal is five-eight here. You sound excited Brooke."

"I am. Old old friend arriving in Papeete tomorrow—Dr. Nicholas Adams of the Rockefeller Institute, on his way home after trying to save the world from bugs."

"Nicholas Adams! I must see him, Brooke. This friend of yours, he's got to come up to Cardinal Rock! He's the first decent surgeon in these parts in many years and I need him badly. Will you ask him to come? Tell him to come!"

"How can he get up there, Hedwick?"

"My yawl will arrive in Papeete tomorrow for supplies. Huaku and Attu are aboard. They will give him passage, I will communicate with them by their radiomarine telephone! In the name of heaven, Brooke, persuade your friend to come! Nicholas Adams indeed! I've got to sign off, old man. Call me tomorrow night and give me his answer. It's got to be yes, Brooke!"

"I'll do my best."

"Goodnight, old man."

Brooke turned off the record and glanced at Nick Adams. Nick chewed on his pipe stem, his face a mask. Rum, he was thinking. The whole business was rum, and he knew he should have no part of it. But he was a medico, and the guy was in trouble and wanted a surgeon. It might be life and death. It might be more interesting than he knew. Rum business, rum, but he decided, in a flash, to make the detour.

Brooke could see it in his face. Brooke said, "By Jove, you *are* going to do it!"

"I'm a fool," Nick said bluntly. "Oath of Hippocrates and such sentimental rot. Yes, I'll go." But it wasn't that at all. The man's voice fascinated him, the way Hedwick had spoken his name in such shrill, sad desperation.

Two days later, when he sailed northward in a yawl manned by two solemn, intelligent Tahitians, Huaku, the older, and Attu, the stronger, Nick Adams wished he had gone on his way to New York. But it was too late for that.

Brooke's final words were, "I want a detailed account of the whole thing when you get back. Nicholas, old butcher. He said it would take two weeks, maybe three. So I want every word from your lips when I see you again." He smiled blandly. "*If* I see you again. One never knows, does one?". . .

EIGHT days passed before they made a landfall. Nicholas Adams heard Huaku hail the sight of the island early one blue-black dawn. Nick slipped into some clothes and went on deck. He felt a curious exhilaration when he stared into the dark horizon and saw Cardinal Rock.

Actually, there was nothing cardinal about it then, not in the eerie dawn light which hooded it. But it was no mere pimple either. For despite its short circumference, it rose out of the sea in a savagely majestic thrust, ominous and precipitous.

Later, when sunlight touched it and it had grown in height and bulk, he saw the reason for its name. The sun's red reflections struck the red clay which covered the tuff, and the place burned like a ruby against the cool emerald sea. It did not look habitable from the south; all rock and promontories.

But it changed on the northern side where the yawl dropped anchor in a small cove.

From that side, the island rose from sea level to the peaks on the south side, much like the arrangement of an orchestra at a concert, rising upward from the violins to the tympani. Up in the middle of the slope was a white house. It was as clean and neat and modern as anything in Westchester, he thought. He hadn't seen anything like it in the southern seas. It seemed so odd sitting there.

Then Huaku rowed him ashore in the dinghy. Nick saw a man waiting for him at the dock. Nick thought, I'm meeting Hamlet. This was a tragic figure, this stiffly thin man in white linen. Nick climbed up onto the dock, found himself face to face with his host.

The thin man said, "My name is John Hedwick. Dr. Adams, I presume?" He said it the way Stanley must have said it to Livingstone, coolly, calmly, and yet excitedly.

"It was quite a trip," Nick said, shaking hands. "Your two boys are fine, and so is your boat."

"I'm sorry to have imposed upon you to this extent," John Hedwick said. He seemed very remote. "Will you come up to the house, doctor, and let me make you comfortable?"

Nick examined Hedwick's face. It was sad and melancholy, and yet serene. It was strange to see the man evolve out of the voice which had come over the wireless. He was darkly tanned, with faintly prominent *rugae* over his eyes. His nose was thin and sharp, his mouth sensitive. There were striations in his flesh from nose to mouth, from eyes to jaw, and circles of pain under his eyes.

At the house, Nick Adams washed and changed his clothes and then ate a delicious breakfast which Hedwick himself prepared. As he finished, Hedwick sat down at the table, staring moodily at him. Nick said, "You're a quiet sort of guy."

"One gets too used to solitude," said Hedwick. "You cannot talk to yourself, you have to think. It is a little different now, with these small comforts I brought back from England. I have a generator, and the latest victrola, so that I do not have to dream my symphonies any longer. I can actually hear them. . . . For twelve years I dreamed them, Dr. Adams."

"Yes, Brooke said something about that," Nick replied. "Hell of a time to be Robinson Crusoe."

Hedwick did not smile. "Step into my study, if you will." He paused. "Do you speak German?"

"No," Nick said. "That's one language I skipped."

Hedwick smiled. "No matter." He seemed pleased. "We have another chap here, Ludwig Frucher, old friend of mine. Lost his mind some years ago, they were going to put him away in an asylum, but I managed to bring him back here with me. Completely harmless, doctor; don't be alarmed. Just not rational. He can't speak English, only German. I didn't want you to be alarmed, in case he sees you. He doesn't know you're here, and naturally, he'll beg you in his native tongue to take him away. Stays up on the cliffs mostly."

Nick grunted, "He doesn't know when he's well off. This may not be heaven, a lonesome spot like this, but from some of the asylums I've seen, it's close to it."

THEY went into the study. It was not unlike Brooke's place on Moorea, except that it was neat and orderly.

There was an ancient gramophone in the room, the early version with the big horn. The wood was faded walnut, and the thing looked pretty ramshackle. There was a record on the turn table. Nick frowned. It seemed so out of place in the trim room, sitting there beside a modern honey-wooded instrument.

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"Oh, that," said Hedwick faintly. His face was a mask. "That is a memento, doctor. I would have to tell you a little story for you to understand it. That was left with me in 1917 when I set foot on this place. Just the three of us, the gramophone, the record, and me. One second, I'll play it for you."

He cranked the instrument and put on the record. It was terribly worn, and you could barely hear the music through the scratching. The orchestra was tinny and jazzy, and Nick could not discern the tune until a tenor in a high shrill voice sang, *"Have you ever been alone, far from home? Have you ever been blue? . . ."*

It was very bad. Hedwick shut it off. Nick finally remembered it as a hit of a bygone day.

"Surprising how it's lasted," Hedwick said. "Had to make needles from thorns after the steel supply gave out. I used to hate it—I thought it would drive me mad—but I wouldn't destroy it. It was another voice besides my own, and in the end, it kept me sane. I'm grateful to it indeed."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," Nick said.

"Well, you see, I commanded a destroyer in his Majesty's Navy during the war. I had the bad luck to be torpedoed and sunk in an action off Wellington with an armed German raider. Fancy that, an armed raider doing me in! But fact is, she was very lucky and had discharged a salvo of torpedoes at the ship from extreme range and happened to get a hit. The other survivors and I were taken aboard the German and imprisoned, with the captains and crews of ships she had destroyed."

"I get it," said Nick. "Like von Luckner, the Sea-devil, and his raider *Seeadler*."

"Quite," said Hedwick. "Though the chap who skippered the *Cameroon* was hardly the gentle soul von Luckner turned out to be. No, the captain of the *Cameroon* was a young man and bestial. He wanted me to divulge certain naval secrets, including the disposition of ships which were searching for him at the time. I refused, of course.

"And then the gentleman resorted to torture. He put me ashore here in the dead of night, with none of the other prisoners aware of it, and few of his own crew aware of it, and said that he would let me get used to being alone and that he would come by once a month and see if I were still a proud Englishman. He left the gramophone and the record with me."

Nick Adams smiled. "Hedwick, I have been around the earth and seen a lot of things. So you will forgive me if I disbelieve your little fable."

Hedwick was neither amused nor displeased. "I fancy it sounds fantastic, and yet it's all quite true. Not that I think even the worst chap—which he was—would have marooned a fellowman purely for the sake of information. There was more than that. For one thing, I struck him before his crew. I did a rather good job of it—I suppose that I should not have—and he lost complete face. He slapped me, you see, to wipe away my—how did he put it?—my arrogant English pride. And I retaliated in kind. So he told me that he would let me test my effeminate brand of British culture against nature, where I would soon learn that aesthetic things were worthless, and that physical power alone counted."

He smiled sadly. "Turned out quite the contrary you know."

Nick said, "What did you do for twelve years?"

"WELL, it took a year to get used to the fact that my life might be spent here without ever seeing another mortal. After that, it got a good deal easier. There was fruit and food in abundance, and I gardened quite a bit. That part of it was easy. I determined not to talk to myself. So sometimes, at least twice a day, I would listen to the record. Have you ever been lonely, doctor?"

"No," said Nick. "Not that lonely, at any rate."

"Then I'd reread all the books I had ever read. I would reread them in my mind. And I would listen to all the music I ever heard. And when they both grew stale, I would write new books in my head, and compose new symphonies, and think new poems, and dream new dreams, and do you know, I almost became a philosopher."

"What do you mean, almost?"

"I didn't quite," said Hedwick. "I never quite lost the idea that since I had beaten the game fairly on my own, it was only fair that my friend of the *Cameroon* should have a chance, since it was his original idea. Revenge, perhaps? So you see, I never did quite become a full philosopher."

"But you returned to England finally," Nick Adams said. "Why didn't you stay there then? Why did you come back?"

John Hedwick replied faintly, "I simply had to come back. The outside world was ruined for me. It was harsh and violent and it nearly drove me mad. I didn't want it to be that way, it just was. I had to come back for my own sanity. It's difficult to explain unless you have been silent and alone for twelve years. For a time, after I was rescued, I'd almost forgotten how to speak fluently. It came rather hard. And frankly, I haven't been this garrulous in a long day, but you're rather a special visitor, and I wanted you to know. I've never told Brooke all this on the wireless."

"Thanks," Nick Adams said. "I understand a little."

"And since you are here as my medico," said Hedwick, "I must bind you to secrecy under your oath as a doctor."

"Of course," Nick said. "What's wrong with you?"

"Suppose you examine me and see for yourself."

LATER, when Nick had finished, he looked very grave. John Hedwick smiled faintly at the expression and murmured, "As bad as that? But I knew it would be. It's been going on for such a long time. I used to think it was the hate in me that did it, the hate for my friend of the *Cameroon*. Perhaps it is."

"It's far gone," Nick said. "You can't do anything about it at this late stage. Caught early, it might have been treated with radium but the only thing you can do—"

"Morphine, yes. I've been doing it. Well, doctor, that's what I wanted you to come for, to tell me how much time there is."

Nick said, "I've always frowned at these prophets of Hippocrates who date you. Usually the patients outlive the doctor. But I don't have any scruples, Hedwick, in telling you that if I live to reach New York for my vacation, I will have outlived you."

"So short? Two months then?"

"At the most."

Hedwick shrugged. "Then perhaps I shall not wait. It would be easy. A morphine overdose."

Nick Adams was not impressed. "That's between you

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and your conscience, Hedwick. I'm not so much a hypocrite that I'd be shocked at the thought. Many's the time I've wished to finish it for some poor devil."

"You are an old friend," said Hedwick, "in this short time. Thank you for your diagnosis. I'd like to offer you further hospitality here, doctor, but perhaps it would be wiser if you sailed tonight for Papeete and home."

"Look here," Nick Adams said, "was that cock and bull story really on the level?"

"My word on it," said Hedwick.

"Why didn't you give in when the *Cameroon* came back each month?"

"I might have. The *Cameroon* never came back."

WHEN evening fell and dinner was over, John Hedwick escorted Nick to the dock and saw him safely aboard the yawl. Hedwick also brought down the old gramophone and the old record. He placed the unit safely on the dock and covered it with tarpaulin.

Then he said, "Five hundred miles was a long way to come for a day's visit, doctor. You have been kinder than most men I've known. I appreciate it. I must ask you again never to disclose all this."

"You have my word," Nick Adams said.

"And please don't be alarmed tonight by anything you see. Obey Huaku. He has complete instructions. *Aloha,* doctor, *aloha.*"

"But wait a minute," Nick cried, as Hedwick shut the door of his cabin aboard the yawl. "What about your ward here? What about the fellow you spoke of this morning? What will he do?"

"I will take care of him," Hedwick called faintly through the door. "Don't worry about Ludwig, doctor, I will take care of him."

And then he was gone, and Nick found the door locked.

After a while, the yawl moved out to sea and headed south. From his porthole, Nick watched the island, black against the dark sky. When the yawl was miles south, he saw a red glow brighten the night and finally, there were great flames shooting skyward above the island, and he knew the house was burning. He watched for a long time until the darkness closed in again. The yawl held her weigh.

Next morning his door was unlocked.

OFF Papeete, a week later, Huaku and Attu put him in a boat and rowed him ashore with his luggage. They rowed slowly, looking back, and he watched with them, and saw the slim vessel slowly sink as the sea poured in through her opened sea cocks. The natives had followed Hedwick's instructions to the letter. Ashore, they said goodbye to him and disappeared. He never saw them again.

Brooke was astonished to see Nick back so soon. He shot question after question, all of which were gloomily parried. He got quite angry.

"You and your damned ethics," said Brooke. "I arranged the whole thing, and you leave me out in the cold. For heaven's sake, Nick, I can't stand the suspense. A week ago, Hedwick called me on the radio and told me that he was destroying his transmitting equipment and *SK*-ing forever. Now what's it all about?"

But Nick refused to talk; when he sailed for home, Brooke had reconciled himself to life without the answer.

Back in New York, having considered the episode at great length during the voyage, Nick made a discreet inquiry concerning the master of the raider *Cameroon* during the war. He was not surprised to learn that a Captain Ludwig Frucher had commanded the ship. Captain Frucher had since disappeared from his home in Bremerhaven, and nothing whatever had been heard of him since.

For two months, Nick struggled with his conscience. He wanted to keep his word to Hedwick, but the implications were plain enough, and he felt himself a party to the plot. One such act did not demand another, and finally he felt that he would have to break his pledge. He wrote Brooke a long letter about the affair and left it to Brooke's discretion to handle the thing.

Brooke took a long time to reply. When his letter finally came, it read, "At first, I thought you were out of your head, old butcher, but then, being a novelist and well aware of the oldie about truth and fiction, I decided that—instead of informing the Commissioner of the Western Pacific—I would take things into my own hands. I needed a vacation, so I chartered a fine sloop and made the voyage to the Rock. Everything there substantiated your facts.

"My party and I found John Hedwick's shallow grave, in which he had been buried rather carelessly by Herr Frucher. The house was charred wreckage with nothing of value surviving the flames. Hedwick did a complete job on that—probably used gasoline.

"As for Frucher, we found him hanging from a tree beyond the sand line; he had used his leather belt for the purpose. I'd deduce that he lasted some three months on his own, for the corpse was new. We found the gramophone on the beach, smashed very badly by a club. There was a broken record on the turntable title *'Have You Ever Been Alone?'*

"I imagine, from the evidence, Herr Frucher had been.

Yours,

Brooke."

Tired Kidneys Often Bring Sleepless Nights

Doctors say your kidneys contain 15 miles of tiny tubes or filters which help to purify the blood and keep you healthy. When they get tired and don't work right in the daytime, many people have to get up nights. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder. Don't neglect this condition and lose valuable, restful sleep.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may also cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills. (ADV.)

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Beside that night highway Cleve bent over the unconscious figure

Swords In Exile

By Murray R. Montgomery

Start now this rousing story of Cleve and d'Entreville whose brave blades serve Richelieu's empire

IN A brief audience with CARDINAL RICHELIEU, SIR HARRY WINTHROP announces that he bears the King of England's pardon for LORD RICHARD CLEVE, who was banished some years ago from his homeland because he spoke the truth at the wrong time. But Richelieu, unwilling to lose the services of his brilliant if unpredictable Guardsman, lies to Sir Harry, telling him that Cleve has left his service and disappeared.

Actually, Cleve along with his rakehelly partner, GUY D'ENTREVILLE, is at the present moment in Calais, charged with the deportation of BARON VON ERLA, an Austrian spy. Cleve and d'Entreville were ordered to ship off their prisoner from Metz, but they have come to Calais in fruitless search of a girl named MARY DE SARASNAC, with whom d'Entreville has fallen violently in love. At length they put Von Erla aboard a Spanish ship and consider their job well done; they cannot know that within a few hours Von Erla has made a deal with the ship captain to convey him to Savoy, the scene of his next operations.

THE two Cardinal's men have disobeyed their master, and the interview between d'Entreville and Richelieu is a stormy one. Cleve is inexplicably absent. Richelieu is lenient to this extent: instead of imprisoning the two rakehellies, he gives them the task of investigating the present crisis in the Duchy of Montferrat.

Montferrat is a vital buffer-state, lying close to Piedmont and the Duchies of Savoy and Milan. Spain dominates the Duchy of Milan, Austria controls Piedmont; and the two countries would launch an invasion of southeastern France if they could take possession of Montferrat. What deeply troubles Richelieu is the news of treason in Montferrat and the report that French gold-trains have been looted there. So Cleve and d'Entreville are to cope with this perilous and complicated situation.

While Richelieu is explaining this to d'Entreville, Richard Cleve makes his appearance. He is in a fury, for he has learned from the English ambassador of his pardon, and he has seen through Richelieu's duplicity. Insolently he accuses the Cardinal; he resigns his commission in the Guard; and he makes his escape from the palace in spite of the Cardinal's halbardiers. His intention is to follow Sir Harry Winthrop and claim the king's pardon.

Then Richelieu plays a characteristic coup. He orders

This story began in last week's Argosy

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d'Entreville to capture Cleve, or else the Englishman will be shot down before he can escape from France. Guy understands that he must accept in order to save his friend's life, and so he sets out in pursuit of Cleve. . . .

CHAPTER VII

DUKES WILL DRINK

SAVOY lay in the Rhone Basin amid ice-capped peaks. At the capital, its sovereign lay amid ice-packed compresses. But while the duchy lay serene beneath warm blue skies, the duke lay moaning and cursing beneath a rumpled mass of bed-linen. He felt very sick, the result of a night spent in his cups.

His head ached in thick bulging throbs. A man of fifty had no business to engage in drinking bouts with men half his age. *Por Bacco!* They had been burning garbage in his mouth while he slept. He shifted. The lavish furnishings of his bed-chamber in the Palazzo Madama hurt his eyes. He turned them to the bearded face of Count Zarrini, his beetle-browed prime minister, who stood solicitously at the bedside.

Zarrini looked both disapproving and sympathetic at the same time—no mean feat—and said apologetically: "Baron Von Erla arrived in Turin last evening, Your Highness. He is waiting outside."

Duke Charles Emmanuel glared. He habitually glared at Zarrini. The truth of the matter was that he didn't like Zarrini. Zarrini was a wind-bag and a martinet. But he was efficient, so the duke tolerated him.

"Well, tell Signor Von Erla that I don't want to see anyone," he directed flatly. "I'm indisposed! I'm dying, tell him. *Peste!* Who does he consider himself, pounding on my door at this hour?

"He considers himself the new Austrian ambassador, Your Highness," Zarrini replied patiently. "Upon seeing his credentials, I consider him the ambassador too. He insists that his visit is of great importance and apologizes in advance for the irregularity."

The duke sat up slowly, wincing at the movement. His grey-streaked mustachios gave him a lop-sided appearance, for one was erect and bristling, the other adroop. He wore a silken night-cap with its tassel dangling irritatingly down from beneath the ice-packs to the bridge of his bulbous nose.

"No peace," he grunted. "I'm dying and this Von Erla insists upon visiting." He stuck out his tongue and tried to view it. He only succeeded in appearing cross-eyed and slightly ridiculous. He tucked it back and sighed.

"You'll see the Baron, Highness?" Zarrini pressed anxiously. "Remember he is representing the emperor's Court in Vienna. You can ill-afford to offend Austria, Your Highness."

"Silence!" Charles Emmanuel glared at his aide. He levered himself into a more comfortable position and groaned as his head clanged warningly. "Show this Von Erla person in, Zarrini. *Peste!* The things I do for Savoy!"

BARON VON ERLA entered, a brilliant figure in green and gold. He smiled pleasantly, but there was fatigue in the depths of his eyes. He had entered Turin at dawn in a dust-grimed coach, springless and hard-seated. He had slept only four hours, and for two weeks that had been customary. It was Cleve and d'Entreville's fault. Vividly he had cursed them every jarring league of the way from le Havre.

After the usual salutations, during which he lied politely about his health while Charles Emmanuel didn't, he seated himself beside the bed on a gilt-paneled chair.

"I shall strive to be pertinent to avoid impertinence, Your Highness," he said, with an eye to the Duke's unhappy state.

"Eh?" the ducal brows shot up. Then he chuckled feebly. "Pertinent to avoid impertinence. *Si.* Very good." He glared at his minister. "Why can't you say clever things like that?"

Zarrini shrugged uneasily and said nothing and Von Erla made full use of the pause. The plot he had formulated during his journey across France was simple enough to be practical, and yet not obvious.

"It is about Montferrat, Your Highness," he said.

Charles Emmanuel straightened. It was as though Von Erla had used a magic phrase, changing the duke from a drink-haggard old man into a covetous diplomat. And Von Erla knew why.

Montferrat was the one unfullfilled dream of the duke's life. The dam of his ambition. It was only the vindictiveness of Fate that had robbed him of the Duchy. His grand-daughter, Margaret of Savoy, was the niece of the original duke, with a claim to succession only superseded by Montferrat's present ruler, Duke Vincent. If Vincent hadn't been born, everything would have worked out beautifully. Montferrat would have become Savoy's, through Margaret's accession to its throne. But Fate had decreed otherwise—emphatically.

Margaret's claim was worthless now. Shortly after her second birthday, Duke Vincent had become father to an heir named Henri, who from all reports, had grown into a revoltingly healthy man. Small wonder Charles Emmanuel felt bitter. Mere consideration of Montferrat caused him great discomfort. Its loss robbed him of greatness. And so he was always interested in any plot that might rectify this error of Fate.

"What about Montferrat, Signor Baron?" he asked.

Von Erla shrugged. "Nothing, Highness, except that I can place it in your hands, if you'll promise me an alliance with Austria against France."

HE SAID it in an unpretentious way, as if he were offering the duke a dish of olives, and Charles Emmanuel was taken completely aback. The baron gave him little opportunity to recover.

"Undoubtedly I sound a trifle grandiose, Highness. Permit me to explain. You see, I make the offer not in my official capacity as ambassador, but as a private individual. Frankly, to get your signature upon a treaty with my government would give me inestimable prestige in Vienna. It would give me a greater title and more land. I am prepared to go to any lengths to realize such ambitions."

He smiled tightly. "You see, Highness, I place my cards upon the table, face up. I have in mind a little scheme to place the Duchy of Montferrat in your hands." He tapped the bedspread significantly. "Legally, Your Highness. But before putting it to operation, I desire assurance that you'll sign with Austria against the French after it is done."

Charles Emmanuel rubbed his face. With Montferrat in his control, Richelieu would be unable to harm him should he sign with Austria. Von Erla kept talking.

"At present I want nothing more. After the Duchy has

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legally become part of Savoy, we can discuss the alliance at greater length. Is it agreed?"

The other eyed him sharply. "What is your plan, *signor?*"

"Begging your patience, Highness. That is my concern. Not even Vienna knows of it. But I am certain of success, else I would never dare broach the question."

"Hmmm." The duke was scowling, thinking deeply. He wished fervently his head would cease aching so much. Von Erla had gone into this business with brutal abruptness, and he needed time to think clearly.

At the moment he couldn't see how one man could accomplish what the combined strength of Spain and Austria had failed to do for six years past; to take the militarily impregnable Montferrat from France. But the duke was an opportunist, and therefore inclined to accept Von Erla's enigmatic proposition, whatever it was. After all, what had he to lose? Von Erla struck him as clever enough to invent a scheme worth the gamble, and if the scheme failed, Savoy couldn't be held accountable. Von Erla was an Austrian.

"Very well, Signor Baron," he said finally. "I gain more than I lose by giving you my promise; therefore you have it. Grant me Montferrat and I'll become Austria's staunchest ally. But I doubt that any intrigue you may be brewing will be potent enough to succeed."

Von Erla smiled confidently. "'Tis your privilege, Highness," he said, and as he left, added: "I trust your granddaughter Margaret is enjoying the best of health."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SPIDER FROM AUSTRIA

THE RED LION INN of Turin was a rambling structure, flanked and fronted by hedged gardens and backed by the Dora Riparia River. Von Erla had chosen this unpretenious establishment for his headquarters. As he walked through the door to the deserted grog-room, he was met by Kringelein, his saturnine aide, newly arrived from Vienna. Kringelein, a dark-visaged man of gaunt proportions, was sitting in a corner of the raftered room, his boot-heels on a table, a tankard of wine in his bony fist.

He reported: "There is a lady to see you, Herr Baron," and took his feet down. "I sent her upstairs. She gave the name of Catherine Cordoba."

Von Erla smiled. "Good." He was pleased that Catherine had arrived, for it meant that his plot could now be set in motion. He had written her to come, of course; he had sent his message by a high-priced dispatch rider from Mont Genevre two days ago. But he hadn't expected her for another day.

"Have a bottle of spiced-wine sent up," he told Kringelein. "Then follow."

Kringelein nodded. *"Jawohl."* He finished the rest of his wine and stood up, topping his blond superior by a good three inches. Kringelein had worked with Von Erla in the past. "You do not wish to be disturbed, eh, Herr Baron."

Von Erla smiled slightly and walked away.

Catherine was standing by the latticed window of his four room suite at his entrance. She turned, an adorable creature, petite and graceful, with delicate, perfect features. Rippling curls the color of ripened wheat framed her face, and her startlingly blue eyes had a look of charming innocence. But Von Erla had no illusions. Catherine Cordoba was one of the most venomous women with whom he had ever worked. She was an ambitious and quite ruthless adventuress.

He nodded. The sight of her awakened his old bitterness, and he felt the hatred rising in him now. But he controlled it; his face was expressionless as he pulled up a chair for her and took one himself.

"There are matters I would discuss with you, Catherine," he said. "Matters of importance to us both."

CATHERINE settled back and patted absently at her well-groomed coiffure. "Really? You should have come to Montferrat, Friederich. You know where I live."

She had used that tone before. Used it to say: "As an *intrigant*, Friederich, you are a genius. As my lover—a buffoon. Really, darling I—" He shut the rest of it out of his mind. Memory of it now might bring the smoldering bitterness into flame, and he needed complete control of his emotions if he was to set the trap which would make her pay for his suffering three years before. Needless to say, she had used him to better her position as long as she could.

"I did not dare come to Montferrat," he said slowly.

"No?"

Von Erla smiled grimly. "I am not welcome in France. His Eminence the Cardinal saw fit to deport me with assurances that should I return to French soil, my arrest would be immediate. Montferrat is a French protectorate, if you will remember. At the moment, I cannot afford to waste my time in prison."

"You haven't changed," she said dryly, then shrugged. "Well, I am here. What happens?"

He studied her thoughtfully. Then he said crisply: "The chance for which you have waited a lifetime, Catherine. The chance to become a duchess!"

That shook her out of her condescension. Her blue eyes narrowed. She said but a single word, spoken softly: "How?"

"You are with me? You guarantee co-operation?"

"To become a duchess, my darling, I would co-operate with the Devil himself."

Von Erla smiled tight-lipped. "I don't doubt it." He hunched forward. "Within a week, Catherine, a man will appear in Montferrat wearing a sword with three rubies set in the hilt."

"What of it?"

"You will get in touch with him."

"His name?"

"Mazo Gardier. Ever heard of him?"

"No. Who is he?"

Von Erla leaned back. "One of the cleverest assassins in Europe, my dear. A soldier, a professional killer— anything, if the price is right. I met him at a wayside tavern in France and hired him on the spot to—er—dispose of Duke Vincent of Montferrat for me."

Catherine folded her hands in her lap. She regarded him in silence. She wasn't shocked. She was calculating. Finally, she said: "You are playing for high stakes, Friederich. If I'm to engage in political assassination I'll not work for a pittance."

"Naturally. Your reward shall be of the highest. After all, I am counting upon your influence over the duke's son, Henri." He smiled bitterly. "From reports Henri is athirst to marry you."

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Catherine shrugged. "Henri's a soft fool; he will do whatever I ask. I have a manor-house, a town suite and two coaches. The only thing that prevents our wedding is his father."

"Excellent. Now returning to Gardier. Remember, you will recognize him by his sword. Three rubies in the hilt. Upon his arrival in Montferrat, make contact with him secretly; acquaint him with the duke's habits and daily routine. If possible, you might steal a palace key-ring for him—"

"Really, Friederich. I'm not an amateur. Let's not waste our time over simple details. What am I to receive for my trouble?"

Von Erla smiled, thinking of the stinging his pride had taken when she had laughed at his love three years before.

"Yes, we mustn't forget your reward, my love." He stared down at her. "But I thought the question answered itself. Gardier will kill Duke Vincent, and with the duke dead, Henri will succeed. As you have just admitted, Duke Vincent is all that prevents your nuptials. Your reward Catherine, is the Duchy of Montferrat. You become its duchess." He shrugged. "Simple?"

She frowned. "No. You do not aid others without first aiding yourself, Friederich. What is it this time?"

He had an answer. "A mere matter of dissolving the present French protectorate over Montferrat. Afterward as duchess, you will allow Austria to assume control."

It was a plausible lie, and she accepted it. Then a knock interrupted them. A lackey appeared with the spiced wine and after dismissing the man, Von Erla poured it into two crystal goblets. He handed one to her.

"To success, my dear," he murmured. "To your new title, Duchesse de Montferrat!"

"I'll drink to that," she said, and her wide eyes regarded him innocently over the rim of the glass.

HE ACCOMPANIED her to her coach, a few minutes later. He bade her a fond goodbye and returned to the room. Kringelein was standing by the window. Von Erla closed the door softly and stood with his back to it.

"Did you hear everything?" he asked.

The big man nodded. He had been posted outside the door during her visit. He always assumed that station whenever his superior engaged in conversations that were of a secretive nature and yet needed an unknown witness. Kringelein's sad horse-face as frowning.

"I heard. I didn't understand it."

The Baron giggled. He crossed to the liquor table and poured himself a drink. "Neither did she. Not the real motive. And that's the beauty of it. She will make an admirable tool to aid my man Gardier—and afterward an adorable widow."

"Widow?" Kringelein went to the cabinet by the door and found a half-empty bottle of brandy. He was tired of wine. He pulled the cork with his teeth and took a swallow. "Oh. After Duke Vincent, comes Henri, eh?"

"Precisely. Gardier has my instructions, and by then she will have acquainted him with the palace, the routines, the secret entrances. She'll trust him, understand?"

"*Ja.* Wheels within wheels, Herr Baron. The duke and his son dead—Margaret of Savoy has the throne."

"And Austria an alliance with Savoy," Von Erla reminded him. "It is to that end we are ever working, Kringelein. Charles Emmanuel will have Montferrat; and Austria will have Savoy, and France will have to eat humble pie." He sat down smiling. "And all that I have to do is to remain here in Turin and enjoy myself."

"Good," said Kringelein and sat down too. He was tired.

CHAPTER IX

HIGHWAYMAN AHEAD

WHEN RICHARD CLEVE charged from Le Palais de Richelieu, to vault into the saddle of his waiting horse, he had expected a chase and had ridden accordingly. He knew nothing of d'Entreville's roughly executed delaying tactics and his only idea was to put as much distance between himself and the Cardinal as possible.

Spurring madly out of the courtyard, he sent pedestrians into terrified flight as he galloped through Paris. The streets became a blur of startled white faces, jammed intersections and bulky carts, ending abruptly at the East Gate to become well-worn country highways.

He hammereed onward for a league before realizing the absence of pursuit. It puzzled him somewhat, but he didn't let up. Sir Harry was somewhere ahead in a slow coach, with a fourteen-day handicap. Catching him would take speed and a devil's amount of stamina.

He bent low against the stallion's neck, talking courage into its flattened ear, and streaked like a flame over the green swelling countryside between Paris and Melun. His black cape licked behind him and he reached one hand to tighten its clasp as he frowned into the wind.

Then the tavern known as La Fleur Blanche served him his first definite clue. Changing horses, its proprietor explained at length that an English nobleman had lunched at the tavern two weeks past. " 'Twas a coach and six, *monsieur*. Its postillion told me that they planned to stay the night at Troyes. No, they were not traveling fast, *monsieur*. A good pace, but not fast. Would *monsieur* desire a quick repast to fortify his hours on the road?"

Cleve smiled. "Brandy'll do the trick quicker," he replied. "Fetch a bottle. I'll gulp as I gallop."

Then, Troyes . . . St. Aube . . . Chaumont . . . Langeres. He careened through them all, a sweat-streaked figure pausing for hot soup, a fresh mount, another flask of brandy and then flashing into the night again, down the silvered road that seemed to waver endlessly across France. His body was aching with exhaustion, but his mind remained fresh, and now for the first time he began to understand the pattern of his life these last few years.

It was a senseless pattern. Caught in the bitterness of exile he had followed a reckless rakehelly course, one without purpose. For his early dreams had become meaningless, and there was nothing to replace them. There could be nothing for an exile.

It was not merely Richelieu's duplicity that had caused him to spur hell-for-leather out of Paris. A deeper motive, unrecognized then, had sent him on this frenzied race—this rash defiance of the Cardinal. That same motive had been the reason for all his restlessness, his wild urge to action. In reality he loathed the role of a man without a country—a man without a purpose. He was sick to death of being a useful outsider. He was tired of fighting for foreign causes.

"Risking life and limb for the unification of France!" he muttered. "Damme! What in Hades is France to me?"

What he wanted was roots—roots deep in English soil,

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with which to grow. Because he was denied that, he had lived restlessly and without aim; and now Sir Harry's arrival in Paris had broken the cynical self-control which he had built up during the long sojourn in exile.

A DEW-DAMPENED wind put its fingers into his doublet and reminded him that it was cold. He took another drink and cast the flask away. The dark country through which he was riding had once been the Duchy of Burgundy—the proud, haughty Burgundy of Charles the Bold, now grown peaceful and submissive to the French crown.

It was hill-studded terrain, well timbered. In places trees arched over the road to convert it into a black tunnel. Cleve cantered cautiously, guided by the moon-shafts leaking through from above. He felt physically grateful for the respite, but his mind chafed at the delay. Faith! He was losing precious time!

Then a ragged S-turn brought him again into the silver translucence of the night. The road ahead was straight. He raised the whip, and then paused. Blotted against the misty white road lay a dark mass. A sprawling mass, which a moment later he recognized to be a horse. A dead horse.

He swung stiffly from the saddle, puzzled by the absence of a rider. Surely the fellow was somewhere near—possibly lying senseless in the roadside brush. By the look of things it had been a nasty spill. The horse had been shot to end its misery.

Then a voice came to him, softly pitched. "Stand where you are, *monsieur*. One move and I—I'll put a ball into you!"

It came from behind, from the side of the road. It didn't sound particularly dangerous so he took a chance and turned quickly. A tongue of flame licked from the shadows, a sharp report—and the trailing part of Cleve's white plume jerked free to float lazily earthward.

"Egad!" It had been close. He immediately assumed that he made too good a target, and dove into the dust and lay limp as death.

"You're not hurt," the voice informed him cheerfully.

He raised his head. "Faith! And 'tis no fault of your's, m'lad." He stood up, drawing. "Now come out of there and I'll give you another chance at me. This time on my terms."

"Drop your sword, *monsieur*. I have another pistol."

Cleve grinned. "Well then, we'll forget my terms," he decided and let the weapon thud to the road.

A SLIM figure, a mere boy, eased cautiously into the moonlight. The barrels of two unwieldy horse-pistols glinted. Cleve eyed them respectfully; wondered which was loaded, which empty; and then decided that it didn't make much difference anyway. They were both trained on him.

He surveyed his ambusher next. The lad was either a page or the scion of some local nobleman, for he was well garbed. He wore the usual accoutrements of travel: high-boots, a long cape and a broad-brimmed hat. Cleve shook his head.

"You don't appear to be the type that makes a living from the highway, laddie. What's the reason for this?"

The youth inclined his hat-brim briefly toward the Englishman's horse. The shadow concealed his face. "I need your mount, *monsieur*," he said.

"Oh. Then the attempt on my life was incidental."

"It wasn't an attempt, *monsieur*. Had I desired to hit you, I would have hit you. I am very proficient in the use of firearms."

"I see," Cleve said. In the face of that, there was little else to say. A cocky brat.

"The town of Jussey is but a few leagues away," the boy volunteered. "You should be able to walk there by dawn."

"Your consideration overwhelms me, bucko. What if I object?"

The boy waved one of the pistols. "I still have this, *monsieur*."

"Yes. I was afraid you'd remember it." Cleve sighed and folded his arms. One thing certain, he didn't want to walk if he could prevent it. Time was precious. "Now mark me, lad. There is little need of this. I'll be glad to ride you to Jussey and there you can purchase your own mount. Damme! You can't weigh very much and my horse can carry double."

"*Oui*. But not as fast as it can carry one, *monsieur*. I have a vital need for haste."

The speaker thrust one pistol into his sash and felt cautiously for the bridle. I was going to be difficult to keep one pistol leveled while attempting to mount, and he realized it. After a short fumbling attempt, his voice snapped crisply through the night.

"Go to the side of the road, *monsieur*. Sit there and make no sudden leaps."

Cleve cursed. A fine mess! Still, a pistol and a child was a dangerous combination, so he obeyed. He found an embedded boulder and sat down. He put his hands against the stone and came into contact with the rough surface of a loose rock—a rock the size of a small apple, probably cast there by the wheel-spin of a passing coach. He gripped it thoughtfully and stared at the brat swinging gracefully astride his horse.

"Very well, bucko. Since I can't reason with you—"

The boy, feeling secure now that he was a-saddle and his victim too far away to reach him, thrust the pistol into his sash and waved cheerfully.

"*Au revoir, monsieur*. Thank you for the horse."

"Don't mention it, son!"

The Englishman's arm looped savagely forward. There was a *clunk* as the rock sped true to its target, followed by a *thud* as the target fell to the ground. Cleve caught the horse before it broke away.

The youngster was out. Out definitely! His plumed hat was off. His head lay framed against the white dust of the highway in a froth of black, moon-glinted hair. A good-looking boy, Cleve thought. Too good looking! The fineness of feature, the delicate arch of the lips under trimly molded nostrils, the amazing sweep of eye-lash, made him beautiful.

"Egad, laddie. You'd make a lovely girl."

Then, because the figure lay so unnaturally still, the English cavalier knelt quickly to feel for the heart-beat. He drew his hand back suddenly.

"Gad's teeth!" he exploded. "You *are* a lovely girl!"

He lifted her to a more comfortable position on a mossy slope. The numerous questions streaming through his mind were temporarily stemmed by his concern. She lay very still, very pale. He began messaging her wrists and then loosened her collar. The fact that she breathed evenly, though softly, was the only indication that she was alive. He frowned. A hat, plus a thick mass of lovely hair, should have been enough to prevent a skull fracture, yet—

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Then he heard a faint rippling whisper. He arose, followed the sound and almost fell into an anaemic rivulet coursing through the dark underbrush. He filled his hat with water and returned. And she was waiting—her pistols trained.

"Keep a good distance, *monsieur*!"

Cleve pulled up abruptly and began to call himself names for not disarming her. Then he shrugged. "*Madamoiselle,* I badly need that horse for—"

"So you found me out?"

He grinned. "Yes. And I must aver that you make a delightful boy, *madamoiselle.*"

"Enough!" She began backing slowly toward the stallion. "You shall receive payment for this horse, if you care for it. Send a letter to Mary de Sarasnac, Chateau de Lesport in the Province of Nivernais and—"

Cleve interrupted. "Egad! You are Mary de Sarasnac?"

She nodded briefly. "*Oui.*"

His eyebrows cocked. "Why, then you're the Kitten's light o' love. You're the one we searched the corners of France to—"

But she didn't hear him. She had dug spurs to the horse to gallop away, leaving him staring, mouth twisted in a smile of incredulity, hands still absently gripping the water-filled hat.

"Faith, Mary! You're a woman of parts, true enough. First Calais and now, Nevernais."

Then the frosty blue-grey of the night absorbed her. He stood by the bushes for a long moment asking himself questions and receiving no answer. The only thing definite was the fact that she had taken his horse and left him to trudge the rest of the way to town. A pleasant creature!

"I'd like to wring her neck," he muttered and jammed on his hat. Cold water gushed over his ears and down his collar to knock the breath out of him. He stood very still. "Or drown her," he concluded blackly.

CHAPTER X

THE BRAVO'S BLADE

THE BRIGHT gold of morning had washed away night when he finally arrived at the Inn of the Silver Flute on the outskirts of Jussey. The ivy-hung tavern was athrob with activity.

Two coaches stood in its court being trimmed and refurbished. At the side of the building, three groomsmen were saddling horses. A baggage-burdened lackey wavered in an out amongst busy coach-crews, followed by a diminutive postillion in green and white, who bellowed commands to all, with accompanying gestures. After the clammy gray silence of dawn, it was refreshing.

Cleve slid lightly from the tail of the hay-cart which had carried him to town and stood regarding the scene contentedly. He had walked two leagues before the cart had picked him up. He waved adieu to the taciturn peasant-wagoner and entered the yard. He needed a drink—a large drink, and then perhaps a few hours sleep.

The tavern's interior was quiet enough, though somewhat crowded. Travelers in France were invariably uncommunicative in morning and over-communicative at night. Hangovers, he decided, for they drank prodigiously after a day's jarring in an effort to wash away the discomfort of the trip.

Then he found an unobtrusive table beside the fireplace and sat down. It seemed years since he had last relaxed. The dancing flames in the hearth warmed him. He reveled in the soothing murmurings of the low-raftered room. Finally, one of the house-lackies drew near and bowed.

"Your pleasure, *monsieur?*"

"Hot buttered rum, m'lad. Plenty of it. Later, a room."

The servant hesitated. It was a mysterious order, undoubtedly expensive, and the order-giver did not look prosperous—dirty boots, rumpled doublet, battered, feather-drooping hat. The man inclined his snout.

"Hot buttered rum, *monsieur*?"

Cleve frowned slightly and nodded. He had learned the recipe from a friend who had traveled in the American Colonies and anticipation of that brew had been adding spring to his gait during the dawn.

"Hot buttered rum," he reiterated firmly and looked sarcastic. "You *have* rum, haven't you?"

"*Oui.* English Jamaica, *monsieur.*"

"Good. A bottle, a slab of butter, a lemon and some honey." The lackey started away. Cleve stopped him. "Then two pewter tankards. One filled with hot water." He tapped the table. "And hurry!"

AS THE lackey left, the proprietor of the Silver Flute approached. He had been standing by the sideboard.

"*Monsieur,* did you arrive on foot?"

Cleve nodded.

The landlord smiled professionally. "Your comrade told us to expect you, *monsieur.*"

Cleve's voice didn't betray his surprise, although it flooded his brain. "My comrade?"

"*Oui.* That young man who brought your saddle bags to our establishment," said the inn-keeper. "The handsome youth. We have placed the luggage in your room, *monsieur.* I trust that you enjoyed your morning's walk. Your comrade told us how you enjoy such things. A healthful eccentricity, *monsieur.*"

"A questionable eccentricity," Cleve corrected. He frowned. "Is my—er—comrade about? I'd like to thank the little—"

The inn-keeper shrugged. "*Mais non, monsieur.* He rode off."

"I was afraid of that. Well, *monsieur le maitre,* perchance you can aid me on another score. Did an Englishman in a coach and six pass through, let us say, a week and a half ago?"

"He did, *monsieur.* In fact he stayed the night. Sir Harry Winthrop. A very important personage, *monsieur.*"

"*Very,*" agreed Cleve dryly and brightened as he saw his lackey threading toward him.

Now, if one hot buttered rum can ease the fatigue of a busy day, then two can restore the energy of a twenty-four-hour ride, so Cleve made three. He was finishing his fourth, when a newcomer to the grog-room attracted his attention. It wasn't the man himself, but the way everyone sidled to one side as he strode slowly into the place.

THE MAN was quite tall, with dark hair and obsidian eyes. He carried himself arrogantly with his gloved fingers touching the hilt of his long rapier. That rapier caught Cleve's eye.

Three bright rubies were set in its haft. They glinted in the sun streaming through the windows, seeming alive in their brilliance. It was a beautiful sword, the sort a connoisseur of fine craftsmanship might carry—or an expert

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duelist. Observing the newcomer, Cleve decided on the latter.

The fellow looked dangerous. He stood in the center of the room, staring coldly from face to face, as the conversational hum stuttered and faded. His thin lips were straight beneath a hooked nose and a dark waxed mustache. His flinty features were expressionless, deadly. Here was a killer if ever Cleve saw one, and he was looking for somebody. The Englishman decided to tend to his own business. He took another drink. Hot buttered rum was making a new man of him.

Then the bravo spoke in a tone that was flat, colorless: "Which one of you gentlemen walked into town?"

Cleve frowned. Now here was a peculiar question, for he had walked into town. But what had that to do with a man he had never seen before? Nothing, he decided. Nevertheless, he was interested and he placed his tankard carefully upon the table and waited for someone to speak. One minute passed. No one said anything.

"Well?" the speaker challenged. "Who came afoot? Speak up, curse you! I found the horse, a dun-colored mare, three leagues down the road."

Cleve shifted. With a sensation of distinct detachment he suddenly realized that the call was for Mary de Sarasnac. The horse she had left dead upon the highway had been a mare, and dun colored. But that wasn't what caused the English gallant to sit up. It was his active, almost feline, curiosity. In the past it had been the cause of more trouble than he cared to remember, but he forgot that now; it suddenly became vital that he know why this fellow was after her.

"I walked into town, *monsieur*," he said. "That was my horse."

The man's gaze settled on him. Those eyes made Cleve suddenly wary. His cursed curiosity had dropped him into trouble again. If he was a judge of men, trouble was about to be served on a sword-point. The stranger's face was expressionless, but the very blankness of it was a warning. Cleve had met ice-blooded professionals before.

"Well?"

The man started toward him deliberately. "Thought you were younger," he said. His ruby-hilted sword suddenly glinted. "Say your prayers. Your ears are too long. I have trailed you since yester evening just to shorten them."

Still Cleve didn't stand up. Events did race in this country! He was frankly nonplussed. He sat at the table, elbows planted, steaming tankard posed midway to his lips, wondering. True, he had anticipated difficulties, yet not this quickly.

"Faith! Put up your blade. There is no reason for us to fight."

The stranger's voice had no tone to it. "It won't be a fight, lout. Here take—"

BUT CLEVE acted first. A split second before the speaker's steel licked for his throat, he hurled the contents of his tankard into the man's face. A sudden brightening of those flinty eyes had been his warning. Cleve rolled out of his chair as the sword-tip gashed a furrow across its back. The man leaped away, cursing; wiping the sting of hot buttered rum from his eyes.

Cleve came up with his sword out, still confused. "Damme! I've never met a man with such kindly impulses. Now hold it! We ought to talk this over."

"My purpose is to keep you from talking anything over, trickster!"

Cleve just missed being skewered by the accompanying lunge. The steel licked under his chin; severed his cape-clasp as he jerked himself away from it. He decided right then to cease appeasement. This fellow was out to get him!

"All right, bucko! We'll play it your way!"

The grog-room was clear of patrons. At the first exchange everyone had sought less turbulent surroundings. The inn-keeper and half his staff stood in the doorway, fearful of the inevitable wreckage costs, but otherwise resigned. Expensive brawls were something to be born—like the weather and taxes.

Cleve eyed the empty room appreciately over the sheen of the bravo's blade. He needed space. There was a wall to his left and a glowing hearth behind. Every time he bobbed to parry a deep thrust, his sword-arm jarred solidly into the mantle.

"Don't suppose you'd retreat a bit so that I can get out of here," he suggested amiably.

The man cursed and lunged viciously at his throat. The English rakehelly caught it in *quarte* and bent it aside. He sighed. "No. I didn't think you would."

Then he suddenly unleashed a flurry of thrusts, designed to put his opponent on the defensive. It succeeded. The fellow wasn't alarmed, but he was too smart to attempt standing up to them. He retreated slowly, and Cleve's breath gave out by the time they reached the center of the room. The strength the rum had lent was false and beginning to fade.

"I think you're acting foolish," he gasped and grinned tiredly. "But 'tis your funeral." A thrust in *tierce* nearly pinned him and he gulped. "Egad! I *hope* its your funeral!"

The killer was pressing. He met Cleve's feeble attack with a *riposte* in *seconde* and touched off a hornet-like offensive that almost ended the struggle there.

But Cleve dipped away, pirouetting and bobbing like a dancing-master. His opponent closed in. His blade licked hungrily for the throat, the belly, the heart. There was chill confidence in his manner.

CLEVE knew the seriousness of his position. At this pace he could last possibly ten minutes before the exhausting ride from Paris would tell on him. The devil's grin on his lips deepened. He wouldn't wait! He'd cram ten minutes energy into one.

"Here we go!"

He took a trio of jabs on his blade and lunged wildly. The point of the bravo's blade ran a scratch from forearm to elbow, but it wasn't important. The offensive was stopped. The sheer unexpected recklessness of that long thrust had thrown calculations into confusion, especially since Cleve's steel had flashed brightly but three inches from the man's nose. The fellow fell back, off balance, cursing.

Cleve didn't permit him to recover. He pursued crazily, forcing the man across the room with a fierce shower of feints, jabs and lunges. His blade had twenty tips appearing from all directions as split-second intervals. Every trick he had ever learned was thrown into the play.

But it didn't work. The other man was good. He retreated without running and met everything Cleve could offer.

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Then he brought up against the oak-paneled wall and the impact knocked his cool defense momentarily askew. There was an opening! Cleve drove for it. His opponent ducked. Cleve's blade sang viciously over his head and rammed two inches of its length into the paneling.

The man jerked erect once more. There was a snap, as the steel broke beneath the leverage, and Cleve stood staring hopelessly at half his sword. The remainder, a two-foot spike of glinting steel, jutted from the wall.

"And now, eavesdropper," grunted the bravo, "you are undone!"

He measured the English gallant for the *coup de grace,* but Cleve had a better idea. He hurled the useless rapier at the man and charged, his fist rising from the hip. It connected and the man rocked back on his heels; stumbled in groggy retreat to recover balance. He failed. He thudded against the wall and gasps burst from his lips. His sword clattered to the floor and his legs went limp. But he didn't fall. He sagged there on the wall like a side of beef with two inches of Cleve's broken sword protruding from his chest.

THE WORLD went still and time seemed to freeze. But at last Cleve began to recover from his exhaustion, drawing long, ragged breaths.

"Wheew!"

"*Sacre nom, monsieur!* But with your hands! Your bare fists!"

It was the landlord. Cleve stared at him, still breathing brokenly.

"They call it box-fighting in England," he said.

People were pouring into the room. Somebody gave him a tankard full of cognac and he drank of it deeply.Another person brought his broken sword. He held it thoughtfully. The blade had been purchased only a month before and because the armorer was famous for craftmanship and fine steel, Cleve hadn't bothered testing it. But now, staring at the break, he could see where the metal was defective.

"Ten livres wasted." He shrugged and put the sword on the table. "Damme, landlord, what's all this ado? These people behave as though I had just won a major war."

The inn-keeper was excited. "But in a sense you have, *monsieur. Oui!* A major war! *Sandiou!* Do you not realize whom you have bested?"

"I'm too weary for riddles, my friend."

"Why, *monsieur,* you have just slain one of the best blades in France! One of the most notorious duellists ever to draw a sword—Mazo Gardier!"

Cleve eyed him blankly. "Never heard of him," he said and frowned. The basic question of the whole affair was still with him. Obviously, Mary de Sarasnac had overheard something—something vital enough to warrant her death. But what? Cleve shook his head. With Mazo Gardier pinned to the wall like a wilted corsage, it seemed that he'd never know. Then the action of the proprietor brought him out of his reverie.

"Since you have ended the sway of a bully, *monsieur,*" the man was saying, "and since you have broken your blade in the doing, it is but fair that you appropriate your late opponent's beautiful rapier." He pressed Gardier's ruby-hilted sword into Cleve's hands. "To the victor belong the spoils, *monsieur.*"

Cleve felt a momentary lift in his lethargy. He stared at the gemmed sword, feeling the perfection of it, its splendid balance. Here was a weapon that would never betray him. He fondled it reverently for a moment before hanging it from his studded baldric.

Then he said: "Now, mine host, lead the way to my room and if anyone else asks . . ." He smiled wearily. "Tell him I arrived in three coaches, a cart and a chariot!"

CHAPTER XI

YOUR RESPECTFUL PRISONER

AT TEN in the morning a week later, Señor Juan Enrico Luis Maria Castro sat at the bay-window of his suite in the Red Tassel Tavern in Montferrat. He pondered breakfast. In his case, the word pondered was apt. He was the sort who pondered everything—every conscious act of his life.

Right now he was reflecting that his failure to wreck the coach of Sir Harry Winthrop three days ago had so disorganized his digestion as to cause a definite loss of appetite. Sir Harry should have been killed; his papers stolen. Instead, Sir Harry had been thrown clear of the boulder-bashed coach and was recovering now in the palace of Duke Vincent, while his papers were undoubtedly hidden safely in his room.

This morning, as yesterday, Castro didn't feel capable of consuming his usual six eggs, steak and two cups of chocolate, so again he had to rearrange things.

"One steak and only four eggs," he told Beppo his valet. "One cup of chocolate."

Beppo looked nonplussed—not a difficult task for him—and held up four fingers inquiringly. Castro nodded. Beppo scratched his bald pate and shrugged. Beppo was a mute. He allowed his simian features an expression of concern and quit the room.

With breakfast out of the way, Castro turned attention to the scene outside the window. Because of it, he had chosen this particular suite. The tavern crowned a knoll some twenty paces from the Susa Road outside Casale in Montferrat, and from his point of vantage he could see both ends—the heavy gate at the town wall and the highway's abrupt termination a mile away. It dipped sharply up and over a sloping hillock. The view also included a section of the front court near the inn's entrance, a steep-swelling stretch of grazing land, and finally the not too distant peaks of the Alps, gleaming white and saffron in the sunlight.

Castro was particularly fond of this window. Being a veritable paunch of a man, and of consequence much opposed to the rigors his profession imposed on him, he found the view happily advantageous to both business and bodily ease.

Strictly speaking, he was a spy. Of course he preferred not to regard himself as such, but rather as an honorable *agent provocateur* in the service of His Most Catholic Majesty, Philip IV of Spain. At present Castro was located in the Duchy of Montferrat for the purpose of turning such sundry incidents as might arise into advantages for his country.

It was not a difficult task. Montferrat was in an uncertain temper. Its soldiery was sullen; its populace worried, and its ruling house disunited. It was fertile soil for a man whose peculiar talents had nearly plunged France into a civil war a year before.

Besides, Castro didn't look like a spy. He appeared

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more like a complacent merchant. There was something innocuous about his olive, moon-shaped countenance; its button nose and small, amiable mouth lent an air of bovine good nature to the man. He wore a deceptively vapid grin when plotting some villainy, and after its completion, one of sleepy innocence. At the immediate moment, he was looking inoffensively stupid. This indicated concern—deep concern over the appearance of a solitary horseman in the courtyard below.

HE HAD been watching the man since dismissing Beppo, and at first he hadn't paid the fellow much heed. Travelers cantering down the road from the west were not unusual. Castro's examination had been cursory, then attentive, finally apprehensive.

The rider was a tall man, booted and spurred, wearing a short maroon cape upon which was emblazoned the hooped-cross insignia of the Cardinal's Guard. As he drew nearer, the Spanish *intrigant* recognized him as Guy le Comte d'Entreville, called the Kitten, unanimously considered a quick-bladed hellion, and not the least averse to wrecking the dreams of such gentlemen who sought to conspire against France. Watching him approach, Castro was uneasy. He had never met d'Entreville, but in France he had seen him and heard of him from most reliable confreres.

He licked his lips and sighed. With one devil in Montferrat, the other couldn't be far afield. Where was Cleve? He glanced past d'Entreville, up the road, and felt immeasurably better when he found it empty. Perchance, d'Entreville was merely passing. Perhaps there was nothing in Montferrat to attract his attentions—no mission for him to perform.

But then Castro shook his head. He suddenly remembered the night before. At the time his sleep-drugged brain hadn't placed much importance on the incident, but shortly after retirement he had been awakened. A rider had thundered into the inn's courtyard to butt-whipp the door, loudly demanding admission. As the tavern entrance was directly below his bed-chamber, Castro had heard everything. The rider had not been permitted to stay, the Red Tassel being full, but he had asked several questions before riding away. Castro had been incensed over the disturbance.

"Señor Guda," he had barked as the inn-keeper plodded back a few minutes later. "Señor Guda! What was the meaning of that outrage?"

"A mad traveler, *signor*. To judge from his acent, a crazy Englishman. I sent him off. I'm sorry, *signor*."

"Hmmmph!" Castro had grunted.

But now, with Guy d'Entreville standing below, that episode took on a new significance. That crazy Englishman had been Lord Richard Cleve. And with Cleve and d'Entreville both in Montferrat, something definitely was about to break.

Castro began to smile vacantly—the sign of plotting. With those two roisterers at hand, plans had to be altered; a certain person warned. He brushed aside the litter of crockery and reached for a quill and wrote three quick lines. He sealed the note in an envelope and called Beppo.

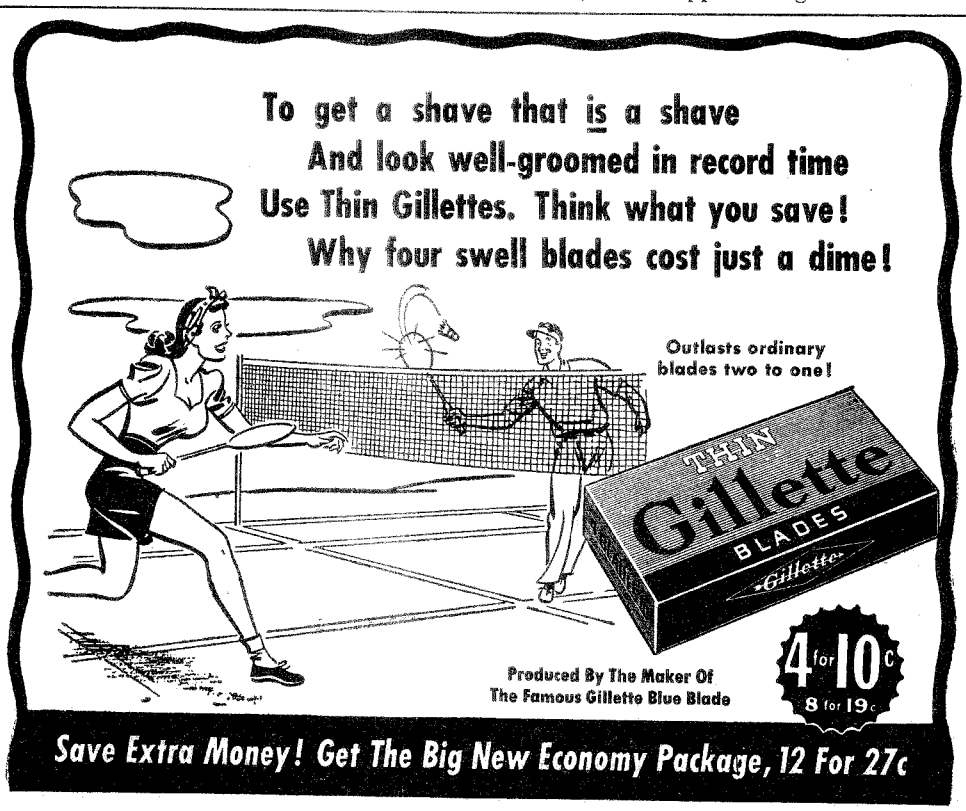
"You know where to deliver this, Beppo," he stated, holding the note under the mute's nose.

Beppo took the note and nodded enthusiastically. He knew. He had delivered others like it before. The note was unaddressed.

GUY d'ENTREVILLE didn't linger at the Red Tassel. A short conversation with the inn-keeper, a beaker of fresh milk while his horse was being watered, and he was en route to Casale with the meager information that a cavalier answering his description had swept past the inn scarcely eight hours before.

"*Mordi!* It's been that way since leaving Paris! And I've been losing! At Troyes, three hours; at Chaumont, four. And now 'tis eight! *Pecaire!* Cleve must ride a Pegasus."

He eyed the approaching town with something akin to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defiance. If it did not contain a certain mad Englishman, then to the devil with the whole affair! The pursuit had left him feeling as if clubbed. No man was worth that—not even Cleve. Besides, the English rakehelly was almost clear of French jurisdiction, and there was a modicum of comfort in the thought.

Guy would not admit it to himself, but he had followed Cleve out of France and into Savoy, first, to prove that he could outride him—second, to wish the mad fool Godspeed. But now, if he caught him in Montferrat, his duty was to arrest the Englishman. He had given Richelieu his word and Montferrat was French soil. He pulled his dust-crusted felt hat down over one eye, hitched up his rapier and clucked at his horse.

"*Allons,* Ferdinand. More quickly."

The streets of Casale were clogged. It was market day and the rural gentry were carting produce to the square for sale. He guided his mount carefully between the overladen wagons and drew up before a group of idlers talking on the corner.

"Perchance one of you gentlemen can direct me to a respectable hostlery."

"Straight ahead, *signor.* The Inn of the Golden Crowns."

D'Entreville thanked the man and rode on. He found the inn, a neat rectangular building with a low stone wall separating its court from the street. He dismounted stiffly and turned his horse over to an adenoidal groomsman. Then he entered the grog-room.

Richard Cleve was in a large room on the second floor rear. He was sleeping. Guy was told this, and at once he climbed the tavern's wide central staircase and burst in upon the somnolent gallant.

"*Corbac!* The end of the chase. *Hola, mon ami!*"

CLEVE didn't wake, and eyeing him Guy suddenly felt less exultant. He realized now that an arrest had to be made. He bit his lip, closed the door and stood irresolutely in front of it.

The chamber Cleve had rented was bare-boarded, sparsely furnished and stuffy. Guy stood staring at the littered trail of garments from the door to the great four-posted bed whereon the Englishman sprawled. He frowned. A man sleeping for long in this veritable oven would come out with a headache.

Finally he went to the latticed casement, swung open its panels and turned from it with fresh, cool air washing the nape of his neck. *Pardieu!* That was better!

But he was still in an unhappy and undecided state of mind. *Ventre Saint Gris!* To arrest one's comrade took courage. Courage of the sort the ancient Spartans used to boast. And although Guy's sense of discipline was strong, it had not yet reached a Lacedaemonian fervor.

He tugged absently at the lobe of his ear, smoothed the crispness of his clipped mustache. The soft luxury of the bed tempted him, reminding him painfully of his own complete weariness. *Peste!* Cleve was no man to cope with when one was exhausted and slow-witted. Immediately action was out of the question. The sensible course would be too catch forty winks.

But his decision was not reached without a vague sense of guilt, and as he stripped himself of his cape, draping it over the back of the desk-chair in the corner, he began to fret as to whether postponement of Cleve's arrest was in strict keeping with his vow to Richelieu. Then he noticed the writing desk—the paper, quill and inkpot thereon—and found a compromise.

When Guy crawled into bed five minutes later, the door had been locked, the key hidden, and a laconic announcement pinned to the wall with the point of a poniard.

Cleve,

Consideration of your fatigue has caused me to execute my painful duty in this manner.

You are under arrest!

Respectfully,
d'Entreville

CHAPTER XII

ARROWS FROM NOWHERE

SLEEP was soft and velvet black. It was a screen, cloaking him from thought and soothing the dull ache of fatigue, then wearing thin as faint saffron light seeped through. This light grew, dissolving sleep, clearing his mind. Then quite suddenly he was awake.

Guy blinked. The saffron glow was still in his eyes. It flooded the room with a wavering light, and raising his head he saw that it emanated from a bottle-based candle atop the writing desk in the corner. Outside it was dark. He could see part of the star-sprinkled sky edged above the black peak of the roof opposite his window.

"A black good morning to you, *mon ami.*"

He massaged his face, yawned luxuriously and then sat up to stretch. In the process he discovered that the bed-surface beside him was quite vacant. But he completed flexing his shoulders before the import of this struck him; and then he gaped. *Sangodemi!* Where was Cleve?

He felt the sting of mortification, for he had asked for this. Springing from the bed, he wondered how long he had slept and how much of a lead Cleve had on him; and then his gaze focussed upon the note he had written and he cursed softly. Cleve had added a scrawled postscript.

P.S.

Kitten,

Consideration of your fatigue has caused the execution of my escape in this manner.

Having business at the palace, I find literary fetters inconvenient. I shall return anon. Wait for me.

Your respectful prisoner,

Cleve

P.P.S.

Where the devil did you come from?

While Guy glared at this, its author was striding jauntily down the dark, twisted thoroughfares of Casale, smiling slightly as he pictured the Frenchman's eruptive reaction, and wondering vaguely as to how serious Sir Harry Winthrop's hurts were.

Cleve had found out about the "accident" that morning. He had come pounding into the courtyard of the Golden Crowns to ask its swarthy proprietor news of Sir Harry. He had been turned over to a battered little man named Jacob, who was Sir Harry's postillion.

Sir Harry was not dead. He was staying at the palace of Duke Vincent where he had been carried after his coach had been wrecked rounding a sharp bend in the Susa Road. Sir Harry had suffered a broken leg and sundry lacerations.

" 'Twas a boulder, sir." Jacob informed Cleve. "A great thunderin' boulder. It came down from the top of a

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steep hill, and before I could halt the coach, it struck us amidships. A most rare sort of mishap, sir. Suspicious."

Cleve had been all for riding to the palace then, but Jacob had deterred him. It was gray dawn.

" 'Twill avail ye naught, sir. 'Tis too early. Besides, the past mornings have been set aside for Sir Harry's full rest, and the duke's physician won't countenance visitors."

Cleve grinned at that. "Damme! I need rest myself, so I'll take the time to get some now. Good evening, or morning, Jacob, whichever the case may be."

HE HADN'T intended to sleep solidly for fifteen hours. Considering it now, however, he decided that it was good. As his boots crunched on the gravel surface of the street, he felt alive again for the first time in days.

He flexed his fingers. They were still stiff from clutching the sill-ledges, wall-cracks and trellis stays that had marked his recent descent from the bed-chamber. Then he pulled the collar of his cape tighter about his throat and increased his pace.

It wasn't late—eight o'clock—but the night was surprisingly chill. The nip of it sent tiny shivers through him. Yellowed windows of a nearby tavern enticed him with their promise of warming brew and a glowing hearth. He shook off the temptation and pressed on.

The street was a narrow, rambling affair that brought him suddenly around one corner and into the cobbled expanse of Casale's market square. Contrasting sharply with the murk of the darker thoroughfares, the place was bright—aflicker with great orange torches and bonfires. A crowd stood in its center, surrounding a rough wooden platform upon which a trio of tumblers cavorted. Cleve was threading his way through the spectators when the first warning reached him.

"Way for Count Henri's men! Make way!"

He skirted the stall of an apple-vendor, little regarding the cry. It came from the outer fringes of the crowd. And then it rang again, this time louder and accompanied by the clatter of hoofs.

"Split, rabble! Give way for the count's riders!"

The gathering split apart. Cleve suddenly found himself alone, facing the charging calvalcade—the green-clad, closely knit troop which had struck into the square like a bow-ball. Then somebody jerked him out of the horses' path and he turned and found a big friar standing at his elbow.

"Stand not irresolute, son, when you hear that cry."

The riders pounded past, laughing and cursing as they rode, madly drunk. Cleve carefully slanted his hatbrim and stared after them.

"Damme! In a hurry, aren't they?" He turned to his rescuer and smiled. "Thank you. Another moment and I'd have been mingling with the cobbles."

The friar shrugged. "I have done it before."

Cleve rubbed his shoulder where the speaker had gripped it and nodded. "I don't doubt it. You have a professional's touch. But tell me, is it customary for the local blades to ride down pedestrians, or has this Count Henri a special concession in the business?"

The friar regarded him. "You must be a stranger in Montferrat."

"Yes. Definitely."

"Then you have not heard of Henri. He is the son of Duke Vincent you know, though utterly unlike him. Duke Vincent is a sincere well-loved ruler. Henri is a roistering young puppy. But perchance I speak harshly. Henri is not a vicious man actually, but a weak-willed youth with evil companions. It is his brawling, blaspheming friends who are causing his downfall. This I know from conversations with his padre."

Cleve looked around. The crowd was collecting itself, muttering imprecations and sending black glares after the vanished horsemen. He smiled wryly.

"I doubt that you could convince these people of that," he said.

The friar nodded sagely. "True. The people are beginning to murmur. Only respect for their duke prevents their speaking. But many fear the day that Henri ascends the throne. There are black days in store for Montferrat, my friend. And the intrigues of the Spanish and the Austrians are not the least of it." The speaker sighed. "Henri is going to be an unpopular ruler, I fear."

Cleve's smile deepened. "Well. He hasn't given me a reason to disagree with your prediction." Then he thanked the friar again and continued his way.

THE palace of Duke Vincent crouched like a grim gray beast atop a sloping hill overlooking the town. To Cleve's way of thinking, it little resembled a palace at all. Palaces were lavish affairs, spired and balconied and set in terraced gardens to enhance their magnificence. This building was stern, forbidding.

The edifice was set firmly in the north-east corner of the town's wall. Its four squat bastions were equipped with arrow-slots, adaptable for muskets. The gate Cleve was nearing appeared strong enough, but it served merely as the first obstacle to an invader. It was set in a high stone redoubt, preceded by a torch-lit fosse of twenty yards, and backed by the palace's main wall into which was cut another portcullis.

He eyed the two breast-plated halbardiers on duty; then hitched up his ruby-hilted blade and marched across the fosse. One of the guards turned and spoke softly into the shadows of the gate. An officer appeared, resplendent in gem-studded doublet, red sash and plumed hat.

"Your business, *monsieur?*"

Cleve arched an eyebrow. The fellow's tone was insolent. He didn't care for it, but felt disinclined to take issue now. "Why, to get in of course." He smiled. "I desire to visit Sir Harry Winthrop."

The officer didn't say anything. He inspected Cleve carefully, eying his battered hat, his travel-stained boots, in particular his sword. Then he turned and held up five fingers. One of the halbardiers disappeared into the gate.

"Do you posess a pass permitting you to see the duke's guest, *monsieur?*"

"My name will prove all the pass I need. Tell Sir Harry that Lord Richard Cleve will shortly visit him."

The officer pursed his lips. They were small lips, arched neatly beneath his pointed mustachios. He smiled distantly. "Indeed? You have the appearance of a nobleman, *monsieur.*" The sarcasm in his eyes brightened visibly. "Incognito, of course."

"Of course." Cleve's fingers settled lightly on the hilt of his rapier. He noted that the halbardier had returned bringing with him five friends. He resumed easily: "And now that we have settled my identity, suppose you escort me to Sir Harry's apartments."

The officer paused. He inclined his head toward the

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newcomers and they closed in. "I shall be happy to escort you, monsieur—" He reached for his hilt. "But to the deepest dungeon in the palace! Seize him!"

CLEVE bounded back. He had sensed this, though he knew no reason for it. His sword glittered in a silvery arc, but he hadn't realized that they were behind him too. A pike prodded against the small of his back and he froze. The officer bowed his blade lightly and laughed.

"Netted!"

Halbard-points girdled him, a solid ring of steel. He stood immobile, sword still poised, awaiting the next move. Finally he sighed and let the weapon fall to his side. What the devil was up, anyway? He regarded his captors narrowly and smiled wryly.

The officer paced up to him like a parading peacock. "We have been warned of you, Gardier," he said. "Only this morning we received the word. Going to dispose of the duke, eh?"

Now Cleve had a reputation of imperturbability in the face of surprise, but this statement caused him to stare in amazement.

"Me?"

The officer smirked. He nodded. *"Oui.* And feigning innocence will do you little good. Candidly, *monsieur,* it was ill-advised of you to appear wearing that ruby-hilted blade so obviously. It identifies you. Beneath the torchlight the gems shine quite brilliantly."

By now Cleve had composed himself. He decided that he'd had enough. "One moment, bucko. I have no designs on the life of Duke Vincent. There has been a mistake—"

"It was yours, *monsieur,* by showing your face here."

The English rakehelly regarded the steel-points surrounding him and took a deep breath. "I'm inclined to agree with you. But that does not alter the fact that—"

The officer snapped his fingers and held out his hand. "Your blade, Gardier!"

Cleve's grip tightened on the hilt. "You're not precisely a fool, laddie," he said easily. "But the difference isn't enough to quibble about. I'm not this Mazo Gardier. I killed him and this blade is—"

"Your sword, *monsieur!*"

BUT here the argument was terminated abruptly. The officer's plumed hat suddenly leaped sideways from his master's head. It zipped past the nose of a gaping guard and grounded itself a few feet beyond. There was a red-feathered arrow in it.

"Shades of William Tell!"

Cleve slowly shook his head. He was becoming incapable of surprise. So much so, that an archer in the seventeenth century seemed completely plausible. Then he turned his attention to the rear and discovered three figures on the edge of the fosse, each fingering a drawn bow with an arrow knotched.

"The next shaft kills the man who makes a move," the smallest of the three promised. "Drop your weapon! And you, Gardier, stand away from those fools."

Cleve obeyed by approaching the trio as halbard staffs rattled on the cobblestones. He noticed that all three men wore long capes; that their clothing was cut for riding and that it did not seem in the best repair.

The smallest appeared to be the leader. He was a beady-eyed individual, smooth-featured and bandy-legged. He looked youthful, until one noticed the hardness about his mouth.

The officer's angry voice grated through the silence.

"This but draws the noose tighter about your neck, Antone!"

The little bowman chuckled. It was a bubbling reckless chuckle. "You must first catch me, my friend."

Cleve smiled. He could appreciate the archer's nerve. Besides, his name made a nice alliteration. Antone—Antone the Archer. The English gallant tapped him lightly on the shoulder.

"For what am I indebted, bucko?"

"For being a greater rogue than I," Antone replied. He produced a dirty fold of paper. "Here. This is for you Gardier. *Sapristi!* I've trailed you all the way from the Golden Crowns to deliver it. Take it and be gone. I can't hold these lovelies at bay forever."

Cleve tapped the paper on his fingernail and frowned. So far, the night's adventure meant nothing. It was a puzzle crammed with questions and he didn't know any of the answers. Antone kept talking, but to his compatriots.

"Retreat slowly, my friends. Do not hesitate to loose a shaft at the first suspicious move. We shall split and meet in our acustomed place in the hills." He suddenly seemed to notice that Cleve hadn't left. *"Sapristi!* Are you still with us? Be gone! We haven't risked our necks just to have you recaptured."

Cleve wanted to ask several questions, but upon the other's words he decided to shelve them. The primary consideration was to get out of here.

" 'Tis your party, lad," he said and slapped the little archer lightly on the shoulder. "Thanks." Then he turned and dog-trotted into the night.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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MEN of DARING

by STOOKIE ALLEN

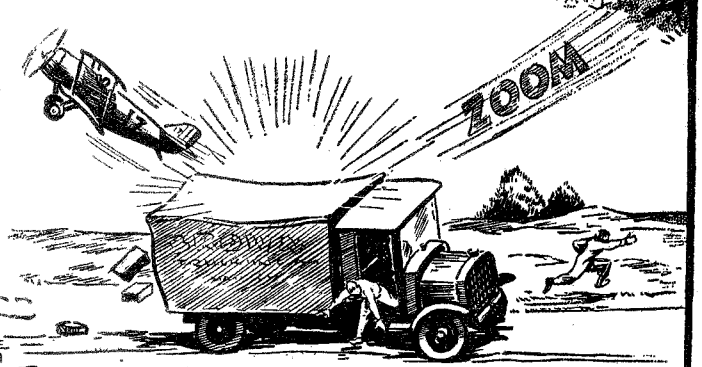
FLYING WRITER

KEN COLLINGS CAUGHT THE FLYING FEVER FROM THE WRIGHT BROTHERS AND THE ITCH TO WRITE FROM HIS FATHER, A CRACK NEWSHAWK. HE SERVED OVERSEAS AS A MARINE PILOT DURING THE WAR, AND THE 1919 HAITIAN INSURRECTION WHERE HE DISTINGUISHED HIMSELF BY TAKING OFF IN THE JUNGLE WITH AN INJURED MAN LASHED TO A WING OF THE SHIP.

KENNETH COLLINGS

THEN HE DID A HITCH AS A STUNT FLIER, AND BECAME THE FIRST "HIT-RUN" PILOT WHEN HE "DUSTED" THE TOP OF A TRUCK, FOLLOWING A FEUD WITH DRIVERS WHO SPATTERED HIS PLANE WITH MUD.

IN 1913 KEN WAS ASSIGNED TO ETHIOPIA AS A WAR CORRESPONDENT. HE ALSO COVERED THE GERMAN OCCUPATION OF POLAND.



WHEN HE INADVERTENTLY CROSSED INTO RUSSIAN-OCCUPIED TERRITORY, RUSSIAN SOLDIERS MISTOOK HIM FOR A SPY. THREE TIMES THEY LINED HIM UP AGAINST A WALL. AND THREE TIMES HE TALKED THEM OUT OF SHOOTING HIM. HE WAS THROWN INTO A CELL WITH POLISH SUSPECTS, AND ONE OF THEM OFFERED KEN HIS BELT, SUGGESTING HE'D BE BETTER OFF IF HE HUNG HIMSELF. HIS IDENTITY FINALLY ESTABLISHED, HE WAS RELEASED.

LAST MAY HE WAS AMONG THE 11 AMERICAN AVIATORS BELIEVED TO HAVE ENLISTED AS "FERRY PILOTS" FOR DUTY IN ENGLAND, WHO WERE REPORTED MISSING AFTER THE TORPEDOING OF THE NERISSA. HE WAS 41 YEARS OLD.

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The Dog from Singapore

One end of the factory was blazing fiercely. Bell and Rowan organized a bucket brigade among the coolies

By L. G. Blochman

Author of "Bringing Up Babu," "Midnight Train," etc.

He wouldn't talk Hindustani, that bulldog; he wouldn't say a word in French. But he knew a lot about murder and arson; and when Inspector Prike tried the right language, his case was in the bag

FARNSWORTH, the district officer, saw the stranger and his dog sitting in the mail tonga as it rattled past his verandah. He watched with only mild curiosity until he saw the tonga go on down the hill, past the bazaar, to stop in front of the *dak* bungalow.

The stranger got out, holding his dog on a chain-leash that flashed in the late afternoon sun. He was traveling without servants.

Farnsworth clapped his hands and sent one of his bearers scurrying down the hill to open the *dak* bungalow, while another went off to find the *khansama* who usually looked after it. Few travelers used the Government of India's rest house at Gandapur. There were so many lonely tea planters in the district, only too eager to furnish hospitality in exchange for the rare pleasure of looking at a new face, that the *dak* bungalow was closed most of the time.

The district officer waited a decent interval to give the stranger a chance to clean up, then with an effort hoisted his massive frame from his fan-backed chair and went down the hill to propose a drink and perhaps dinner. He had scarcely walked through the cobwebby door of the *dak* bungalow, when he knew he had made a mistake.

The stranger, bending over a valise as he came in, slammed it closed, straightened up instantly, and fixed Farnsworth with a challenging stare. He still wore the khaki shorts, white shirt, and khaki topee in which he had arrived. He was very thin, which made him seem much taller than he really was.

The dog came out from under the bed to growl at Farnsworth. It was a bow-legged brindle bull, with an underslung jaw. It was off its leash.

"Hello. I'm Farnsworth, the D. O. here," said the district officer. "I thought perhaps you'd like to stop by the bungalow for a chota peg."

"I don't drink," said the stranger coldly.

"Oh. Sorry." A shadow of disappointment crossed Farnsworth's round, pink, good-natured face. He began to regret having left his fan-backed chair. He noted that the stranger did not volunteer his own name. "If there's anything I can do, Mr.—"

"The tonga driver said the Gandapur tea garden is quite near here," the stranger interrupted. "Is he right?"

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"That's the Gandapur tea garden right over there," Farnsworth said, pointing through the doorway. A succession of hills rolled back from the village, each striped with the green-and-brown plaid of tea plants against tilled earth. "The staff bungalows are just around that first hill, near the factory buildings. The tonga-walla could have driven you right there."

"I didn't want him to drive me there," the stranger said.

"If there's anyone in particular you'd like to see at the garden, I'd be glad to send over a chit for you."

"I'd rather you didn't," said the stranger.

"Yes, of course. Well. Sorry to have troubled you." Farnsworth backed away awkwardly. The stranger stared at him in silence. The bulldog growled again. "Good-night," said Farnsworth.

He hurried back up the hill and had three chota pegs in quick succession.

AT TEN O'CLOCK that night the *dak* bungalow was afire.

Farnsworth was playing bridge with the civil surgeon, and the forestry officer and public works engineer who were stopping with the doctor. He had just bid six spades and the civil surgeon had doubled, when a bearer came in with the news.

As they hurried down the hill, the thatched roof of the bungalow was already a roaring torch, hurling scraps of flame against the stars. Farnsworth pushed through the line of bronzed little Gurka guards who were holding off the crowd of open-mouthed natives. Bearded Sikhs were working furiously at the hand pumps of Gandapur's primitive fire brigade. The thin streams of water had no effect upon the conflagration except to add hissing clouds of steam to the twisting column of smoke and flame.

"There is a sahib in the bungalow," Farnsworth panted as he came up to the Sikh in charge of the ineffectual fire-fighters. "A sahib was a dog."

"No, Huzur. The sahib with the dog was seen to leave the bungalow half an hour before the fire."

"Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, Huzur."

Farnsworth breathed a sigh of relief—just as the roof fell in. In twenty minutes the *dak* bungalow was a mass of glowing embers. The stranger's luggage was no doubt part of the smouldering mass; but he so obviously resented any intrusion upon his privacy that Farnsworth thought it best to return home and play the hand upon which he had bid a small slam in spades.

He was set four tricks, vulnerable.

After the civil surgeon and his guests had gone home, Farnsworth sat on his verandah, sipping a nightcap and wondering if he could have made his contract by finessing the queen of hearts. He also wondered vaguely what had set fire to the *dak* bungalow: a carelessly abandoned cigarette, probably—although for a moment Farnsworth thought he had smelled kerosene.

He continued to sip his drink, listening to a jackal howling. Suddenly he realized that he was no longer stationed on the plains, and that there were probably no jackals in the Assam hills. It was a dog howling.

Farnsworth stood up. A drop of cold sweat trickled down his spine. The dog was some distance away, but its dismal howl sounded clearly in the stillness of the night, rising from the depths of animal woe. Farnsworth put an electric torch in his pocket and went out.

He told himself that he was merely taking a brisk walk before going to bed. Deep inside himself, however, he knew he was going out to look for the howling dog.

He passed the glowing ruins of the *dak* bungalow and continued down the road toward the Gandapur tea garden. The doleful lament of the dog was louder now: a hollow lugubrious note that rose to a sustained crescendo of despair and died in a whisper.

The Gandapur tea garden was only a five-minute walk from the village, and the homes of the personnel were a hundred yards beyond the entrance to the estate. They were all dark: the manager's bungalow, now occupied by Dave Bell, the proprietor, who arrived with his blond young wife only a month ago; the assistant's bungalow, now occupied by Manager Frank Rowan; and the bungalow of Henri Joubert, the factory overseer from Indo-China. The coolie lines were near the factory buildings, another few hundred yards further on.

When Farnsworth entered the plantation, the dog stopped howling. He drew his flashlight, shone it ahead of him as he walked up the road. When he had taken twenty steps, a furious barking began at his right. He left the road and advanced cautiously through the tea plants.

The savage barking increased in fury—almost underfoot. He shone his light downward. The luminous circle framed the open, aggressive jaws of the stranger's brindle bull. The chain leash trailed on the ground.

Beyond the dog the stranger himself lay on his back, his lips parted forever in a silent cry of terror. Without touching him, Farnsworth knew the stranger was dead. The haft of a knife protruded from the crimson bosom of his shirt.

The dog continued to bark.

LIGHTS went on in Dave Bell's bungalow. A screen door slammed and Bell appeared on the verandah steps, a raincoat over his pajamas. He held a flashlight in one hand and a revolver in the other.

"Don't shoot, Dave. It's Farnsworth," the district officer called in a shaky voice. "Come here."

Dave Bell hurried down the road in his slippers. He was a handsome, well-built man with a boyish face that belied his thirty-five years. "What's up?" he demanded. "That damned dog's been keeping us awake for an hour. Is it your— Good Lord, who's that?"

"That's what I was going to ask you," said Farnsworth.

"Never saw him before in my life." Bell came as close to the dead man as the dog would permit.

"He came in on the mail tonga this evening," Farnsworth explained. "I saw him for a minute at the *dak* bungalow. He asked the way to your place. I thought you knew him."

"Maybe he was a friend of Rowan's."

"Couldn't have been much of a friend," Farnsworth said, looking at the knife haft. "The bungalow burned down just after he left it tonight. Didn't you see the flames from your place?"

"We went to bed early," Bell said. "How—"

A scream cut him short—a shrill, chilling cry of terror. Both men whirled. The two flashlights converged on the white, tense face of the blond Mrs. Bell. She gripped a dressing gown of peacock blue silk closely about her shapely young body. Her hand trembled violently, and her blue eyes were round and staring.

Farnsworth had never seen her without makeup before. He couldn't help noting that even unadorned, even on the verge of hysterics, she was still beautiful in an elemental, sensuous way.

"Don't look, Mrs. Bell," Farnsworth said.

"I—I've seen. What happened?" Mrs. Bell spoke with difficulty.

"Nothing. An accident. Go back to bed, Linda," Bell ordered.

"He was stabbed. Who killed him?" Her voice faltered, as if she was afraid to hear the answer.

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"We don't know. Do run along, Linda. Please," Bell pleaded.

"Did you ever see him before, Mrs. Bell?" Farnsworth asked.

Linda Bell shook her head until her blond ringlets quivered. She did not look at Farnsworth, but stared at her husband with some strange fear in her eyes. She swayed slightly. The district officer had a sudden feeling that her terror was not merely the reaction of a woman to murder in her front yard; it was a deep dread, a personal shock that had wrenched her very soul.

"Here's Rowan," Bell said. "Maybe he knows the man."

The manager of the tea gardens, a well-muscled red-head with big ears, came loping down the road ahead of Joubert, the factory man. He, too, denied knowing the stranger.

"The poor chap's done for, whoever he is," Rowan said. "Friend of yours, Joubert?"

Joubert lazily sauntered up to look at the corpse. He was a round, oily man, with a paunch that bulged over the belt of the ragged shorts which were his only garment. He peered through narrow, dark slits of eyes that had some thing of Asia in them. He shrugged.

"No," said Joubert. He turned away and slouched back toward his bungalow, shaking his head as if to say that he resented being disturbed for such trifles.

THE brindle bulldog had stopped barking, but it still snarled menaces whenever anyone approached its dead master. Its eyes were green in the light of the pocket lamps.

"What are we going to do about that dog?" Farnsworth asked.

"Better shoot him," Rowan said. "It's easy to see he's a one-man dog. He won't let anybody else touch him."

"He's a fine-looking animal," Bell declared. "Be a shame to destroy him. I'll try to handle him."

"Good," said Farnsworth. "Then I'll make arrangements to have the gentleman removed right away. I'll see you all later to ask the usual questions."

. . . The first thing that the district officer did when he returned to the village was to get the telegraph operator out of bed, to open a line to Gauhati so he could send a message to the deputy police commissioner. While Farnsworth represented full police authority at Gandapur, he saw he was going to need help on this case.

He was worried—or as nearly worried as possible for the most easy-going D. O. in the Indian Civil Service. This was the second mysterious death in Gandapur in a month.

Just a month ago, on the day that Dave and Linda Bell came to Gandapur, a young tea planter named Green was found dead with a bullet in his head and a gun in his hand. Green had been assistant to Rowan, who told Farnsworth that the boy was terribly homesick and probably killed himself while half-crazy with loneliness.

Farnsworth had believed the story; although Green left no suicide note, it was quite possible that loneliness had affected his mind. Farnsworth knew that loneliness did strange things to tea planters. Some tried to escape in drink; plenty quit; and once in a while some youngster would go balmy.

The strange events of tonight, however, made Farnsworth think he had been perhaps too gullible. Two deaths on the same estate within a month might be a coincidence; again they might not. And the fact that Green had died on the day the Bells arrived, coupled with Mrs. Bell's complete terror at the death of the mysterious stranger—she had not been at all upset over Green's death—decided Farnsworth to seek the help of a more expert investigator than he.

LATE the next afternoon an official-looking motor car stopped in front of the district officer's bungalow. A dynamic little man in white ducks, black alpaca coat, and khaki sun helmet sprang out and went up the steps with quick, determined strides.

"You're Farnsworth, of course," he said, when the district officer gretted him. "I'm Prike of the C. I. D."

"Indeed. You're more than welcome, Inspector." Farnsworth beamed. He knew Inspector Leonidas Prike by reputation. The deputy commissioner must have been impressed by last night's telegram to have sent the Criminal Investigation Department's ace detective. "I hardly hoped to meet you in this forsaken corner of the Assam hills, Inspector."

Prike removed his topee from an amazingly bald head. "I was en route to Shillong for a short holiday," he said. "The burra sahib suggested I might break my journey and your murder case at the same time. Tell me about it."

"Certainly. You'll have a chota peg first?"

"Brandy, if you don't mind."

Farnsworth clapped his hands and gave orders to the red-turbaned bearer who appeared.

As the district officer began his story of the arrival of the stranger, Inspector Prike listened with the abstract attention of a mild-mannered scholar. But when Farnsworth told of Linda Bell's reactions to the discovery of the stranger's body, and of the coincidental death of the young planter on the day the Bells arrived in Gandapur—then a cold, hard glint came into Prike's steel-gray eyes, and the muscles of his strong jaw tightened in sharp, resolute lines.

"You found no marks of identification whatever, Mr. Farnsworth?" he demanded.

"None. There was nothing on the body or in the clothing he wore. The rest was destroyed in the *dak* bungalow fire."

"Deliberately, of course." Prike sipped his brandy. "We'll make photos of the corpse and ultimately our men will run down the man's identity. If possible, however, I should like very much to clean up the case in a day or two, so I can get along with my holiday. Have you the weapon?"

"Right here," said Farnsworth.

Inspector Prike put down his brandy and took the knife. He glanced at it casually, then screwed a jeweler's glass into one eye and examined it again. "Made in Haiphong," he said. "Is there any Tonkinese labor at the tea garden?"

"Joubert, the overseer of the factory, comes from French Indo-China. Matter of fact, I wouldn't be surprised if he is part Tonkinese. He certainly seems to have a touch of the tarbrush. I say, that's important, isn't it, Inspector?"

"Possibly," said Prike. The glint faded from his eyes. He stood up, fondled his brandy glass, and stared out at the woolly pattern the tea plantation made on the hills. For a long moment he was lost in thought.

"Too bad the only eye-witness was a dog," Farnsworth said. "You could leave for Shillong in ten minutes if the dead man's dog could talk."

Inspector Prike turned abruptly. "Perhaps we can get the dog to talk," he said.

Farnsworth started to laugh, but checked himself when he saw that the inspector was not joking.

Before he could say anything, he saw the red-headed Frank Rowan getting off his bicycle in front of the bungalow. Rowan ran up the steps, calling excitedly: "Mr. Bell wants you to come right over, Mr. Farnsworth. Something—Sorry. I didn't know you were busy."

"Inspector, this is Rowan, manager of the tea garden."

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said the district officer. "Rowan, meet Inspector Prike of the C. I. D."

"You're just in time, Inspector," Rowan panted. "Joubert is gone."

"Gone?" Farnsworth glanced triumphantly at Prike, and nodded toward the factory overseer's knife. "Where did he go?"

"Nobody knows. Nobody saw him leave. He stole a rifle out of my bungalow and disappeared."

"That's an admission of guilt, isn't it, Inspector?" Farnsworth asked.

Prike reached for his topee. "I suggest we drive over and have a few words with that dog," he said.

ROWAN held his bicycle on the running board of Prike's car as they drove through the thickening dusk toward the Bell plantation. Prike, sitting next to the redhead, asked him:

"What part of Australia are you from, Mr. Rowan?"

Rowan grinned. "You caught the accent all right, Inspector. I'm from Melbourne."

"And how long have you been manager at Gandapur tea garden?"

"About five years," Rowan replied.

"Five years without a break?"

"Right. Except for a yearly holiday, of course."

"Where do you go for your holiday, Mr. Rowan?"

"Calcutta, usually. Last year I went to Singapore."

"And the missing overseer—Mr. Joubert, is it—how long has he been working with you?"

"About four years. He came the year after I did," Rowan said.

"From Indo-China?"

"Yes. He always said he was from Haiphong."

"Do you know if he's ever been back there on holiday?"

Rowan laughed. "He never arrived anywhere on holiday," he said. "Joubert always started out for Calcutta, but the farthest he ever got was Dacca. He usually woke up broke and sober in Gauhati."

Prike nodded. The car pulled up in front of the Bell bungalow. Dave Bell came down the steps to greet them, his usual boyish good nature clouded by worry. Linda Bell remained on the verandah, standing beside a lamp. She received the men with a cosmetic smile.

Farnsworth thought she was more lovely and less panicky than she had been the night before, yet she was still obviously upset. Her lips trembled as she said: "I hope you've sent your constables looking for Joubert, Mr. Farnsworth."

"Inspector Prike is taking over, Mrs. Bell."

"We'll all join in the hunt," Rowan said. "Just tell us what you want us to do."

"I suppose we'd best wait until morning, since the man is armed," Bell said.

"Before organizing a hunt," said Inspector Prike, "it is always good to know exactly what is to be hunted. I should like to talk to the dead man's dog, Mr. Bell."

"Oh, the dog. He's been raising a frightful row all day," Mrs. Bell volunteered.

"He's in the lumber room," Bell said. "This way, Inspector."

PRIKE and Farnsworth followed Dave Bell to a small room at the back of the bungalow. Mrs. Bell held a lamp above her head as Prike opened a door. An outburst of savage sound and a baring of fangs greeted him.

"Stop it, boy," Prike called. "Be a good dog. Lie down now, old chap. Good dog."

The brindle bull continued barking.

"*Kutta, kutta, kutta.*" Prike tried the vernacular. "*Idhar ao, kutta-ji. Umda kutta*"

The barking increased in fury.

"He doesn't understand Hindustani," Bell said. "We've been trying it on him all day."

Prike next spoke to the dog in Tamil Punjabi, and Pushtu. The dog showed no recognition of any of the Indian dialects. He tried French; the dog only barked the louder.

The inspector returned to the front of the house, frowning. "How long has Joubert been missing, Mr. Bell?" he asked.

"He probably left during the night," Bell said.

"Why did you not notify Mr. Farnsworth earlier?"

"Well, we weren't sure. . ." Bell sat down uneasily.

"I told Mr. Bell at noon that I hadn't seen him around this morning," Rowan volunteered. "But that's not unusual. Joubert sometimes went on solitary drunks. It was only when I found this afternoon that he'd taken my rifle from my bungalow that we thought something was wrong."

"I see." Prike turned to Bell. "How long have you owned this estate, Mr. Bell?" he asked casually.

Bell squirmed. "Well, it's not exactly mine," he admitted. "The title is in my wife's name. Linda inherited the plantation from her brother who died in Calcutta three years ago."

"This was before your marriage to Mrs. Bell?"

"After. We were married in Bombay four years ago."

"And this is your first visit to Gandapur?"

"Yes. We'd never been in eastern India before." Bell looked at his wife. "The plantation hasn't been doing very well the last two years; and when we actually lost money last year, we thought we'd better come up and see if we couldn't pull our chestnuts out of the fire. Our tea, rather."

"And are you succeeding, Mr. Bell?"

"Well, I'm not much of a tea planter myself," Bell said. "But Rowan, my manager, seems to think the soil may be played out. What about it, Rowan?"

"We haven't been getting a very good grade of leaf," Rowan said. "I told Mr. Bell that perhaps we'd better wait until after the third picking and then have the soil analyzed. We—"

Linda Bell screamed. She was standing near the door, staring across the verandah with wide-eyed dismay.

Chairs scraped the floor as the four men sprang up. Farnsworth turned to follow her gaze. Several hundred yards away he saw long tongues of flame licking at the darkness.

"Another fire!" Linda wailed.

"The tea factory!" Bell exclaimed, starting for the door. "You stay here, Linda."

"No, no!" Linda seemed to grow suddenly older as she gave her blond head a terrified shake. "Not alone. I—I'd die!"

She joined the men already going down the verandah steps.

ONE end of the tea factory was blazing furiously. Men and women were streaming from the coolie lines nearby. The reflection of the fire gleamed on their black Tamil faces, flashed on the gold jewelry in the ears and noses of the women tea-pickers.

While Bell and Rowan began organizing a bucket brigade, Inspector Prike marched straight into the smoke-filled gloom of the sorting and grading sheds, which had not yet caught fire.

"I say, Inspector." Farnsworth ran after him. "Isn't this dangerous, Inspector? Those corrugated-iron roofs—"

"They won't fall on us for at least half an hour," said Prike, glancing casually upward. "There is an obvious connection between arson and homicide in this case of yours, Mr. Farnsworth, and if there is a possibility of dis-

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covering any evidence in the few minutes still left to us—"

The inspector stopped to scoop up a handful of fragrant leaves from the withering trays. He smelled them, examined them carefully by the lurid flicker of the crackling flames.

Farnsworth coughed and tied his handkerchief about his face as he followed Prike through the acrid haze. The inspector was quite deliberate as he walked through the rolling and fermenting rooms, taking his time to run his fingers through the half-processed tea whenever he found any. He seemed even intent on going in for a look at the firing ovens, although the blaze, which had obviously started at that end of the factory, was fiercest there. A flaming timber fell across the doorway, however, before he reached it.

"Inspector—don't you think we've seen enough?" Farnsworth coughed, as Prike seemed to be considering means of surmounting the new hazard.

"No," Prike replied, "but I'm afraid we've seen all we possibly can. Do you know which is Joubert's bungalow?"

"Yes." Farnsworth groped through the smoke for Prike's arm.

"Then take me there, while Bell is still busy with his fire."

Farnsworth lost no time in getting out of the factory. He filled his lungs with fresh air, shook his head violently as if trying to get the roar of the flames out of his ears.

"This way," he said.

They pushed through the lines of Tamils passing buckets, and stepped over the pitifully inadequate hose of the Gandapur fire brigade which was just getting into action. They did not see either the Bells or Rowan.

Farnsworth led the way to Joubert's bungalow and climbed the steps. He tried the door. It was unlocked. He pushed it open—and immediately stepped back into Inspector Prike's arms. Two huge luminous eyes were staring at him from the darkness.

The ghostly, greenish blobs of phosphorescence shimmered from above eye level. The unearthly animal, whatever it was, must be of tremendous size.

Inspector Prike's pocket lamp flung its cone of light into the darkness and the shining eyes disappeared. In their place was a glass jar on a shelf. The jar contained two lumps of some waxy, translucent substance immersed in a colorless liquid. A second bottle stood next to the jar.

Prike pushed Farnsworth aside and walked quickly to the shelf. He removed the cork from the bottle. A strong odor of rotten eggs immediately permeated the room.

Prike grunted with satisfaction. "Here is the explanation of your two fires," he said. "Phosphorus and carbon disulfide. The arsonist dissolved one in the other. When the carbon disulfide evaporated, the phosphorus burst into flame spontaneously. By the time the evaporation was complete, the arsonist was far away."

"But I thought I smelled kerosene at the *dak* bungalow last night," Farnsworth said.

"Probably you did. It could have been poured from a lamp, to help spread the fire quickly after the spontaneous combustion of the phosphorus."

"But why did Joubert set fire to the tea factory?" Farnsworth asked.

Prike replaced the cork in the bottle of carbon disulfide. "That is something we must discover," he said.

HE LIGHTED a lamp and carefully went through the three-room bungalow. He found nothing to interest him until he came to a pair of heavy shoes under an unmade bed. The shoes were caked with clay of a peculiar yellow color.

"Do you know any place in the vicinity where mud of this color might be found, Mr. Farnsworth?" Prike asked.

Farnsworth did not know. He had never noticed the color of the soil about Gandapur.

"We shall have to wait for daylight to make certain," Prike said, "although my impression is that the soil of the plantation is sandy, darker, and not at all yellow." He probed the muddy crust with his finger. It was damp and soft underneath.

Suddenly he straightened up. An ominous sound beat upon the air. Farnsworth looked quickly at Prike and saw in the lamplight that the detective's jaw muscles were taut, his whole body rigid.

The sound came again: a sharp explosion that rolled off the hillside in a deep-throated echo.

Before Farnsworth could say, "Pistol shots?" the detective was already on his way out of Joubert's bungalow, running away from the dying fire of the tea factory, toward the bungalow of Dave Bell; and Farnsworth loped after him.

Linda Bell was standing on the verandah, a kerosene lamp in her hand. She was deathly pale, and trembling from head to foot. Prike took the lamp from her quaking grasp and put it on the table.

"Well?" he demanded

"I just got here," she whispered. "I heard the shots. They seemed to come from out back."

Frank Rowan came charging up the verandah steps, followed from another direction by Dave Bell.

"What happened?" Rowan demanded.

Prike looked puzzled for an instant. Then, "The dog!" he exclaimed. He whipped out his automatic. "Bring the light, Mr. Farnsworth."

The district officer followed Prike to the back of the house. He held the lamp above his head as Prike opened the door to the lumber room. The night wind blew through a shattered window. There were fresh blood stains among the broken glass on the floor. The bulldog was gone.

ALL EYES were on Inspector Prike as he looked at the broken window, examined the shattered glass. He did not tarry long. Thoughtfully he returned to the living room. Farnsworth, Rowan, Dave and Linda Bell followed him. None spoke as the little detective paced the floor in silence.

Suddenly Prike stopped in front of the fireplace—winter evenings are cool in the Assam hills—bent down, and ran his fingers through a small pile of ashes in the grate. Farnsworth saw him pick out a few unburned scraps of paper—one of them the corner of an envelope with a tiny fragment of postage stamp on it—and drop them again. He straightened up, brushing his fingers against the palm of his other hand.

"Who has been burning paper here, Mrs. Bell?" he asked.

"I'm sure I don't know," Linda replied. She did not look at Prike.

"The ashes were not here earlier in the evening," Prike said quietly. His keen eyes scanned the faces about him. No one spoke. "Come, Mr. Farnsworth," he said after a tense pause. "I think I shall retire for a few hours' sleep before resuming work tomorrow."

"Aren't you going to hunt for Joubert, Inspector?" Bell protested. "Evidently he's still in the neighborhood."

Prike's eyebrows raised slightly. "Is he?" he countered.

"I won't sleep tonight, knowing he's still about." Linda Bell shuddered.

"He's about, all right," Rowan said. "He did for the bulldog."

"I'm not certain Joubert has anything to do with the dog's disappearance," Prike said, looking squarely at Mrs. Bell. "The dog did not understand French. Goodnight, everyone."

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INSPECTOR PRIKE was up before dawn. Daylight was just beginning to gray the East when Farnsworth heard him stirring. The district officer bathed and dressed quickly. He barely had time for a cup of tea before joining the inspector. They drove directly to the plantation.

They found the bulldog just as the sun was coming up over the hills. It was lying among the tea plants, not far from the road, a few yards from the spot where its master had been murdered. It was covered with dried blood from a long gash that split one shoulder and furrowed its flank.

As Prike bent over it, however, the dog lifted its head, bared its fangs and snarled savagely. It tried to get up, but sank back weakly on its haunches.

Suddenly a curious look came into Prike's steel-gray eyes. He addressed the dog in Malay. *"Mari sini, anjing,"* he said softly.

The animal stopped growling and pricked up its ears.

"Bai' anjing," Prike continued. *"Branji anjing."*

The dog wagged its tail feebly.

Prike picked the dog up in his arms, passed it to Farnsworth. "Take it to the Bell bungalow and have Mrs. Bell bandage its wounds," he said. "On second thought, don't. Jump in my car and take the dog to your own place. Do you know Malay?"

"No."

"Then just say *'bai' anjing'* from time to time. That means 'good dog.' Have the pup bandaged, and post someone to stand guard. We must save our only witness. Luckily the person who shot him last night was an atrocious marksman. You'll find me on the plantation."

Farnsworth followed instructions. When he drove back to the plantation from the village, he left the car opposite the still-smoking ruins of the tea factory. Then he asked several tea pickers which way the inspector had gone, and set out across the garden.

He had walked for hours, it seemed to him, without catching sight of his man. He was puffing badly by the time he had trudged to the northernmost limit of the plantation and found himself facing a wall of jungle.

"Inspector Prike!" he called.

There was no answer. He hurried along the edge of the forest, stopping every few minutes to call again, hearing only the deafening hum of cicadas in reply.

"Inspector Prike!"

"Hello, Mr. Farnsworth." Prike emerged from the undergrowth, his white trousers muddy, his alpaca jacket torn, his khaki topee decorated with wet, clinging leaves. "I've just been following an outcropping of rock. I wanted to make sure it was crystalline limestone."

"Really?" Farnsworth blinked his bewilderment.

"You probably think I've gone mad," Prike said, "but you must admit that establishing a motive is sometimes quite useful in a murder investigation. I believe we're getting somewhere, Mr. Farnsworth."

"Are we, indeed? Where, Inspector?"

"Look at this, Mr. Farnsworth." Prike led the way to a narrow pit that had been dug into the plantation, near the edge of the undergrowth. It was only about two feet deep, but it extended for a considerable distance. The soil was of a peculiar yellowish color—like the mud that had caked the shoes under Joubert's bed. "They're all over the place, these pits," Prike continued. "I noticed one half a mile back. There's another right over here."

Prike stooped to pick up a handful of the yellow-brown clay. He held it out, asking: "Mr. Farnsworth, wouldn't you say this might be byon?"

"Byon?"

"That's what they call ruby earth in Burma. And the Mogok ruby fields are surrounded by crystalline limestone formation. Shall we go back now?"

FARNSWORTH had longer legs than the inspector, but he also had a longer waistline, and he had some difficulty keeping up. When they had walked for half an hour between the rows of tea plants, Prike stopped to let him catch up. Breaking off the end of a slim branch, he held it out and asked: "What do you make of this, Farnsworth?"

Farnsworth said, "I'm new to the tea country."

"Look at the end leaves," Prike insisted.

Farnsworth looked. He saw only leaves.

"You will notice," Prike continued, "that the white terminal buds—the buds which yield the flowery pekoe if picked while the down is still on the young leaves—have been allowed to open and develop."

"Have they, Inspector?" Farnsworth tried to register intelligent surprise.

"They have. And as a consequence the next picking is going to yield considerably more souchong than pekoe."

Prike was off again, saying no more until he had reached the Bell bungalow. He went directly to Linda Bell, who was having her morning tea on the verandah.

"The time has come, Mrs. Bell," he said crisply, "for you to tell me the truth."

Linda put down her cup. "I've told you everything."

"The bulldog was not killed last night, Mrs. Bell. And the dog speaks Malay."

Linda's lips parted but she said nothing.

"The letter which was burned in the grate last night," Prike went on, "bore a Straits Settlement stamp; it was probably mailed from either Singapore or Penang. Since the dog obviously comes from somewhere in Malaya, I am assuming that his dead master also came from there. Am I also to assume that Mr. Bell burned that letter to conceal the fact that he corresponded with the murdered man?"

"Dave didn't burn that letter!" Linda Bell sat up very straight. "I did."

"Then you knew the man?"

"Yes." Linda's voice was barely audible. "His name was Hugh Walter."

"Why didn't you say so last night?"

LINDA took a deep breath and looked Inspector Prike squarely in the eyes. "Because I knew that Dave would be suspected of killing him—although Dave never saw the man in his life."

"That doesn't make sense, Mrs. Bell."

"Oh, but it does. Dave has always been terribly jealous of Hugh Walter. He knows I nearly married Hugh once—when I thought I was in love with him. Hugh was a friend of my brother's, and he once owned an interest in Gandapur tea garden. My brother bought him out several years before he died. Hugh left Bombay to go to Singapore—to get rich, he said. He did, too, but while he was gone I married Dave.

"Hugh had written me regularly ever since, saying he was going to take me away from Dave. I've never answered, never seen him since, but just the other day he wrote that he knew the plantation was in trouble, and that he was coming up to buy it—for my sake. That was the letter I burned.

"Until I saw him lying dead, I didn't know he was in Gandapur. I swear it. But I was panicky, naturally, because Dave had always threatened to kill Hugh if he ever showed up. I—"

She stopped. Dave Bell was coming up the steps.

"Morning, Inspector," he said. "Any trace of Joubert?"

"I think we shall find Mr. Joubert later today," Prike said, "just as soon as the corrugated iron roof cools off enough so that we may lift it off the embers of the tea factory."

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"Good Lord!" Bell exclaimed. "You don't think Joubert is dead?"

"I'm convinced of it," Prike said, grasping the back of a chair. "I—"

"Up with your hands! All of you."

THE red-headed Rowan stood in the doorway, white-faced, grim-lipped, a gun in each hand. He had come through from the back of the house.

Prike was the first to raise his hands—flinging the chair across the verandah into Rowan's face.

Rowan's two guns exploded. The verandah was loud with shouts, screams, and the roar of gunfire. Before the echoes had died away, Rowan was on the floor, and Prike was astride him, with a tight body scissors about his middle. Farnsworth disarmed him.

Prike stripped Rowan's shirt from his back, and jerked a small chamois bag from the string around his waist.

"Keep the gun on him, please, Mr. Farnsworth," said Prike as he got up. "He's your man from now on. I suggest you ask him why he killed Joubert."

"I've got nothing to say," Rowan declared sullenly.

"I'm not sure whether Joubert objected to having his knife used in a murder, or whether he had been too curious about the ruby-earth at the far edge of the plantation. I would appreciate your correcting me, Mr. Rowan, as there are several points on which I am forced to guess. You know of course, Mr. Bell, that your manager has been deliberately depressing the value of your tea crops?"

"Rowan? How—"

"By sending the pickers out too late, after the higher-priced leaf had already grown into lower-grade tea. By making the plantation seem unprofitable, he hoped you would be willing to sell it cheap."

"But why?" Bell asked.

Prike tossed over the chamois bag. Bell opened it. Half a dozen dull-red hexagonal crystals ran into his hand.

"Because he has discovered rubies on your plantation. And while he could steal a few as a sideline to managing your estate, rubies are mined in India under Government license, and it might prove difficult to sell stones on which royalties had not been paid. Therefore Mr. Rowan went to Singapore on his last holiday to see a gentleman formerly connected with this plantation. Since this gentleman has become rich in the interim, I assume he was to furnish the capital for buying the tea garden when its present owner had been convinced that it was a liability. His name was Walter."

"Walter?" Dave Bell stared at his wife. "Was the dead man Hugh Walter?"

"Mrs. Bell, I wonder if I could trouble you for a double brandy," Prike said quickly.

When Linda Bell left the verandah, Prike went on: "I can't say exactly what caused the thieves to fall out when Walter reached Gandapur the other night. But it is a safe guess to say that Rowan killed him over a matter of greed."

"He asked for it." Rowan spoke at last. "He wanted to freeze me out."

"Or vice versa," Prike suggested. "You might very well have decided to hog the whole business, Mr. Rowan—particularly if Walter arrived here with the purchase price in his pocket. Make a note of that when you search Rowan's bungalow, Mr. Farnsworth.

"You are a cold-blooded individual, Mr. Rowan. Your murder of Walter was carefully premeditated. You stole Joubert's knife for the purpose well in advance. You planted the phosphorus in Joubert's bungalow to tie up with the two fires. But you really should not have left Joubert's shoes, still caked with ruby-earth, where a curious investigator might find them. No doubt you were made bold by the ease with which you escaped detection for the murder of young Mr. Green."

"Green shot himself," Rowan protested.

"I rather think you killed him because of something he was about to reveal to Mr. Bell. It is quite likely that he had discovered the method by which you were causing a first-rate plantation to produce low-grade tea. That, however, is beside the point. The punishment for one murder is the same as for three. . . . This is excellent brandy, Mrs. Bell. Thank you."

Prike drained his glass, then said: "I think we ought to see how the dog is getting on, Mr. Farnsworth. I would like to take him a large, juicy steak. I might not have remembered that Mr. Rowan was in Singapore for his holiday if the dog had not understood Malay."

"I Talked with God"

(Yes, I Did — Actually and Literally)

and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do — well — there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well — this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a post-card to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 909, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was. — Advt. Copyright, 1939, Frank B. Robinson.

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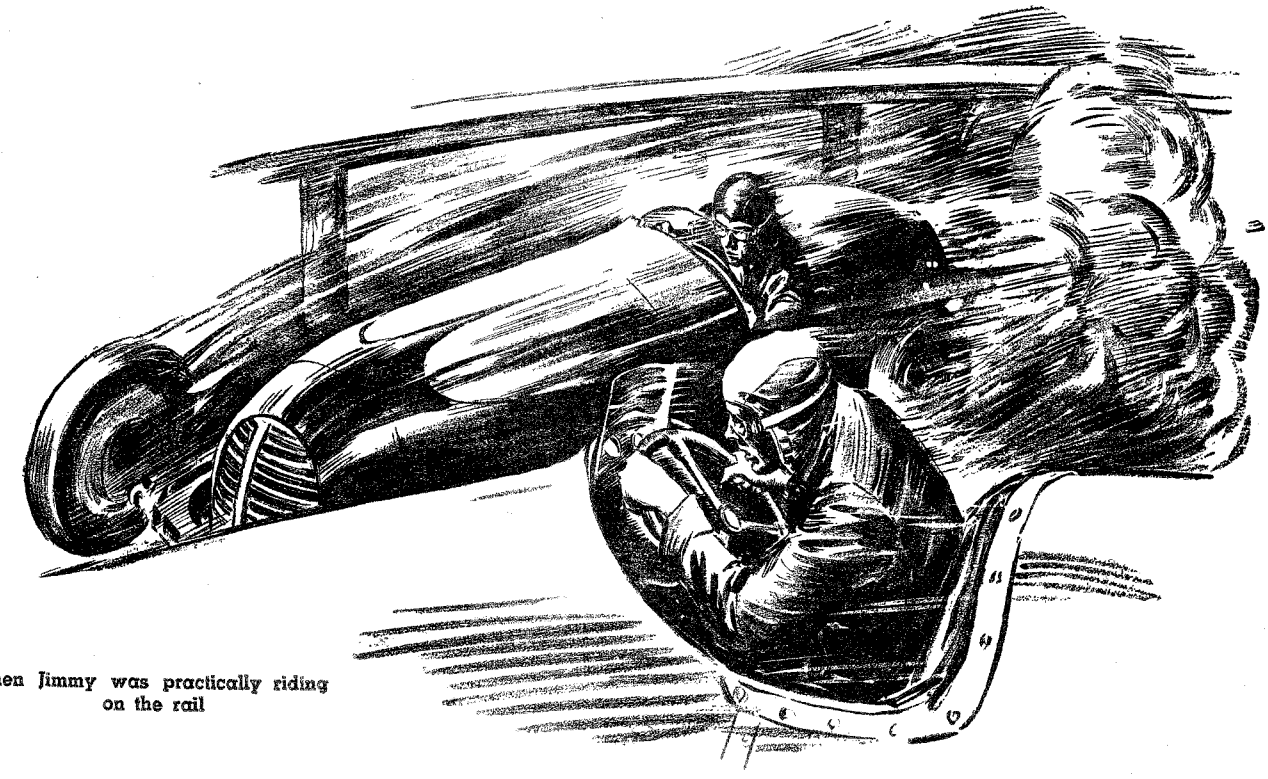

Then Jimmy was practically riding on the rail

Sweet Chariot

Why do they do it, these racing drivers? Why do they spin through endless miles with death on both sides and ahead of them? It's not only for money; there's something else, running in their blood

By William Campbell Gault

IT WAS hot the day I met him. It was early in June, and I was helping to unload Number Thirteen off the truck. It had just come from the garage and I wasn't too happy to see it. For three of my boys had cracked in her that spring, and she was beginning to get a jinx reputation.

Jane was there, lending her vocal support, and managing to look lovely despite her dusty breeches and jacket. Jane's my daughter, and there's no girl in Hollywood who can touch her.

It was hot, I repeat, and I was a little nettled at having to work out in that dusty infield, and I was a little sad thinking about the three lads who had cracked up, and I was a little worried about trying to get another.

It was certainly the wrong time to approach me. But a voice said: "Is that the Apex Ring Special that's been breaking up pilots?"

I turned, very annoyed. This lad stood there, Irish as potatoes, grinning, cocky.

"This is the one," I said. "Was there anything else you might like to know about it?" From the corner of my eye, I could see that Jane was enjoying my temper.

"I was wondering," he said, "if you had a driver for it yet?"

"No." I looked at him more closely. "Are you a pilot?"

"Of course, he said. "Boyle's the name, Jimmy Boyle. You've probably heard of me."

I had, but I didn't admit it then. "Were you looking for the job?" I asked, and my voice was easier now, for this Jimmy Boyle had been the boy wonder of the winter circuit.

"Why, no," he said, "I wouldn't work for anybody but myself. I thought it might be for sale."

"Oh," I said, "And why might it be for sale?"

And then that cocky son of Erin looked righ. at Jane and winked. "He's going to be difficult," he said.

My collar began to feel tight. "Son," I said, "I don't believe you were introduced to my daughter. And if you want to talk about me, talk to me. I don't relish this brass of yours."

"I'm sorry, sir," he said. His voice was humble, but I had the strangest feeling that his tongue was in his cheek. "I didn't mean to be impertinent. I guess winning those southern races this year has made my head too big for my hat."

Jane said coolly: "Maybe he doesn't know this is an Association track, Dad. Maybe he thinks this is still the county-fair circuit."

It was the kid's turn to flush now, and I must admit I enjoyed it. But he managed a smile. "It isn't for sale, then?"

"He's been saving his pennies," Jane said.

"I've saved quite a few," he said. "I could make you an acceptable offer, I think."

I nodded toward the car. "Do you know what that is, what it cost? That's no souped flivver, kid."

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"I know what it is," he said, "It's a Miller designed, two hundred and fifty-six inch four, and it cost plenty." He paused. "I've got five thousand dollars."

That was less than half of what the car cost. But it had been cracked up three times. And I had hesitated for a month about putting another boy in it. "Five thousand," I said. "You wouldn't go fifty-five hundred now?"

"I would if I could," he said. "But that's every last cent I have in this world."

Right then, I began to like him. He was going to needle me plenty in the days to come, but always, from then on I liked him. For I recognized the type, and I thought of Jimmy Murphy, Tommy Milton. This was one of those.

"If that's the case," I said, "you can have her for forty-five hundred. You'll need a little stake if you mean to play the Association circuit."

"Thanks," he said, and for the moment he wasn't even slightly cocky. He took out a checkbook and laid it on the fender of the truck.

As he was filling it out, I said: "Why not drive for Apex? I'd kind of like to have you on my team."

He smiled, and handed me the check. "I've heard about you, Pop. And read about you. There's no one I'd rather drive for. No one—but myself."

Blarney? Sure, but I liked it.

Even Jane was showing a little respect now. For dirt-track pilots who write checks for forty-five hundred are rare. And this Jimmy Boyle was as engaging a kid as you'd want, with all his cheek.

"Why don't you have him up for supper, tonight, Pop?" she said. "I could make corned beef and cabbage."

I guess this Jimmy didn't have any corner on the brass.

HE CAME up for supper. And we talked racing. I told him about them all. From Ray Harroun, who kicked his Marmon home in front in 1911 at Indianapolis, all the way up to little Wilbur Shaw's 1940 triumph. He loved it. His eyes had a shine to them, and he never once interrupted. I knew then that the kid lived for one thing. To race—and to win.

Jane went to the door with him when he left. And it seemed to me they were a long time on the porch. When she came in, she looked worried.

"Pop," she said, "maybe you shouldn't have sold that Number Thirteen."

"And why not?"

"Maybe Mr. Curtis won't like it."

Curtis was the president of Apex Ring. "What's the real reason?" I asked.

She sighed. "That Jimmy Boyle isn't the kind to drive a smart race. He'll get in front and stay there. And you know Thirteen's reputation. It takes a velvet touch."

"On the dirt tracks, it *is* smart to get in front and stay there," I told her. "And I think that Thirteen has met its master."

"Well," she said, "I still don't like it."

I went over to the track early the next morning, to help my number-one pilot, Frank Kern, get our Fourteen job tuned. It was a two-stick four, a duplicate of the job I'd sold Jimmy and it was the iron I counted on to keep Jimmy in second place. Our Number Fifteen was a flat-head, not too fast, but a sticker.

Frank was already there. And Jimmy was working over his new sweetheart in the next pit. He waved hello.

Frank grumbled: "Cocky kid. He told me I didn't have to get up so early to beat him. He said I may as well lay in bed and dream about second money."

"I'll be satisfied with seconds," I said, "until the National. We want to win that one."

"We will," he said. "And if you want second place, too, get my brother up to drive that flat-head."

Frank had been trying to get his brother lined up with Apex for a year now, but the kid had a rep as a rail wrecker. So, despite his impressive win record, I had stalled off. Apex doesn't buy junkers, and I like to keep them as nearly intact as possible.

"First and second money in the National wouldn't be hay," Frank said. "And we could do it."

This National Dirt Track was the event of the year for the mud pilots, the Kentucky Derby of the bull rings. It was at Arco and it was less than two weeks off.

"I'll see," I said. "Maybe we won't even run the flat-head. We'll have those two D-O's from the B team there, and three cars should be enough."

In the next pit, Jimmy was humming. I stopped to listen.

Frank said: "He's been singing that all morning. And talking to the car as though it was a horse or something. The guy's bugs."

I smiled. Jimmy was humming *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* which seemed fitting and proper to me. But Frank's an awful sourpuss, even though he is aces at the wheel.

We finished with the bus, and started her. She was running like a clock. "Give her a spin," I told Frank, "and see how she winds up."

He nodded, and slipped on his crash helmet.

The rest of the pits were filling now, the boys getting ready for the first race this afternoon. But the track was deserted.

I watched Frank idle into the south turn, and then my eyes were attracted to Jimmy's pit. A couple of grease monkeys were pushing him out onto the track.

FRANK came arrowing down the front lane, as Jimmy spanned the back stretch. But when Frank slued out of the south, Jimmy was already nearing it. That Thirteen job was singing, and I'll swear Jimmy was, too. For his lips were moving, and he had a sort of slap-happy look on his face. Swing low, sweet chariot.

Frank must have heard Jimmy coming up behind, because he really souped his hack in the rear alley. And Frank is no slouch. But Jimmy's black Thirteen edged closer, closer.

They hit the north bend with Jimmy closing in. They came out of it hub and hub. I knew then that Frank's goose was cooked. For the elbows were his specialty.

They smoked down the pay-off alley like a pair of matched comets, and all the pit crews stopped working to watch them. There's nothing like a private duel in the morning to put an edge on the day.

As that pair rocketed past, Frank's eyes were slits under his goggles and his mouth was just a line. But that crazy Boyle brat was grinning like a fool.

They slammed into the south in a welter of dust. Frank had the inside, the advantage. The cars were as nearly alike as any two Harry Miller ever designed. But as they broadsided out into the back lane, Jimmy had him by ten feet. I didn't feel so comfortable.

Two rounds later, Frank pulled in. He cut the motor, and just sat in the car, his eyes blank.

When I came up, he said: "Maybe I'm getting old for this racket, Pop."

"That job didn't sound right to me," I lied. "That timing might be a hair off."

"She was never better," Frank said. "But I've been better." He turned to me. "Pop, why not get Red up here for this job? I'll take the flat-head. I'll pay my way with it, too. That Red's a tooler, Pop."

Red was the brother. I shook my head. "You're going to drive this. You're going to make money at this meet, and then you're going to cop the National. That run takes experience."

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"It takes a pair of wrists, too, Pop. My wrists aren't what they were."

I didn't say anything. Jimmy was pulling into the pit ahead.

"That kid can wheel," Frank said. "He's all right, that kid. But Red would take him."

"You will, too," I said, "in the National."

But I wasn't so sure. Jimmy copped the second race that afternoon. He was entered in the twenty-five-mile feature. And he had the pole spot.

Before the race, Jane came over to the pits. She was wearing a skirt and sweater, which was practically going formal for her. She said: "He's a stubborn fool, that Jimmy."

"He's a winner," I said, "a natural. Racing is in his blood. It's all he'll ever be, a racer, but the best."

She didn't look too happy at that, and I began to feel a little uneasy. I'd hate to lose Jane. "You like this fellow, honey?"

She nodded. "Hmm-hmm. But he's certainly stubborn."

I was a little blue. "In what way?"

"He won't quit racing."

I almost passed out. "And why in the name of blazes should he?"

"Why, because it's dangerous, of course. He's a good mechanic. He could get a little garage somewhere."

I stared at her, and wondered if I had heard right. "Could he, now?" I asked. "And could he get the smell of burning castor, the thrill of unleashed power, the wind in his face, the fine competition? Could he get that in a little garage?"

"You read that in a book," she told me.

"Answer me," I said. "Could he?"

"Why—no," she said.

"Well, then, don't try to take it away from him. It's his life, it's in his blood. He wouldn't be a man without it."

"All right," she said. *"All right."*

"And I didn't read that in a book," I added.

"Men," she said, and she turned away. *"Men."*

I KNEW what had changed her into a woman and I was still sad. But I'm glad it was Jimmy. She deserved the best. I looked up into the boxes, to the women up there, reading, talking, knitting. Driver's wives . . . It was a hell of a life. It was day to day, heart in mouth, and constant little prayers going up in the afternoon sun.

But maybe it wasn't the worst. I remembered that quotation I'd read. "Look not too long from the bright face of danger." I remembered that world war sergeant who said, "What the hell, you guys want to live forever?" The safest wasn't always the best life. Or was I just alibiing Jimmy?

He won the quarter century feature. He won it by getting out in front and staying there. Frank copped second.

After the race, Jane said: "Maybe he's just a front runner. He's never been pressed much."

"You're hoping against hope," I said. "He's any kind of a runner it takes to win. He's a winner."

We were having dinner that evening when I heard him coming up the walk. He was whistling, *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.*

Then his head was in the doorway. "Hello." He was grinning at Jane. "How did I look in the feature?"

"Lucky," Jane said.

"I set a new track record."

"The field was pushing you," she said.

He grinned. "Was there a field?"

She grinned then. You couldn't stay mad at Jimmy.

"How's about a movie?" He looked at me. "I'll bring her home early."

There would be no races tomorrow. I nodded.

He said: "There's a little number called *Roaring Oval* at the Bijou. It looks exciting."

"Racing," she said. "We'll go to the Rialto. They've got *Wings of Love.*"

"Is it about flying?"

"No," she said. "It's about love."

"Okay." He winked at me. "I'll have to learn about that sometime, I guess."

As they left, I reflected that it had been a very fast romance. And it was due to be a rocky one. Because both of them were cocky, very cocky.

Two days later, it happened. In the feature . . .

SOME way, a couple of the boys boxed him while Frank was leading. It may have been intentional, or maybe it wasn't. I know that the boys do gang on a youngster occasionally, just to take the wind out of his sails.

At any rate, they went into the twentieth lap, with Frank leading. And a couple of veterans were waging a private duel, nip and tuck, right behind him. Which made Jimmy fourth.

Twice he tried to make it three abreast in the front stretch. And twice he failed. Because the boys were masters, and they had first-rate mills. They carried that way through the twenty-second. The twenty-third.

The third time, he tried to go around in the back lane. He drew even, and souped that sweetheart to the floor. They screamed down that short stretch like one wide car.

But he didn't quite get the clearance to cut back for the groove, and I waited for him to drop behind. For this was the last race of the day and the curves were piled deep with grit. Three cars abreast in those soft curves was suicide. Even two would take all the skill a man could summon. And steel wrists.

I waited for his motor to cut slightly, waited for him to drop behind. But he didn't.

They went into the dusty north, three abreast.

The palms of my hands were wet, and my throat was like a drumhead. In the infield, the ambulance's starter whirred. The stands were up, hushed. Death was in the air.

I heard a hoarse cry behind me. It was Jane.

The lower car had the groove. The second car was not quite even. Jimmy was heading high, high where the deep dust lay. She started to broadside early, edge toward the outer timber.

There was one way, just one way, and I'd seen it done before. By Tommy Milton. The kid cut higher, higher, teetered—and then juiced her around in a power spin.

He was heading downtrack, down the bank now, and he slammed in a straight line for the front lane. He made it—with the legal clearance, and the stands sat down, too weak to cheer.

Frank still led.

But only for a moment. For the kid was a ball of fire and second place would never hold him.

He challenged in the back lane. And Frank was desperate. He threw away the anchor and set sail. Jimmy stayed with him.

I remembered Frank's weak wrists, and I thought of that furrowed bend. I knew what would happen, and I was sick.

Frank never made it. The car slued, straightened, and then went into a gilhooley. Timber flew, and Frank left the car in a crazy arc.

I saw him, just for a hazy second, silhouetted against the sky; and I started to run. The ambulance clanged.

The rest I don't like to talk about.

At the hospital, the doctor said: "He'll live. He'll walk, but with a limp. He's damned lucky."

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Jimmy didn't come around that night. Jane was white and miserable, and I figured she had told him off. There would be no more races here, and we would prepare tomorrow to go on to Arco—for the National.

"When you see Jimmy," I said, "tell him that Frank will be all right."

"*If* I see him," she said.

"Frank doesn't bear him any grudge," I pointed out. "And it's his leg."

"Hmmm," she hmmmed. And then: "Men—racing—"

It was her last word for quite a while.

I KNEW a Miller-trained mech at Arco and he helped me with Frank's car. It was damaged considerably less than I had any right to expect. But I still didn't have a driver.

I didn't have until that afternoon. I was in the pits, and a husky, red-haired kid was coming through the infield. I knew, long before I could make out his features.

His face was broad—and grim. His eyes were just pieces of flint, there wasn't much of Frank in this kid. He said: "I'm Red Kern, Frank's brother."

I shook his hand. It was big, and so were his wrists.

"I want to drive Frank's car in the National," he said. "At fifty percent. That's what Apex pays, isn't it?"

"That's right," I said. Then: "Why this sudden determination?"

"Twenty-five hundred will fix Frank's leg."

"Apex is taking care of that," I said.

"Apex is fixing him so he can walk," he told me. "Another twenty-five hundred will fix him so he won't limp. That's what it'll take to bring a specialist. And that's half of first money. That's what I'll get."

"If you win," I pointed out.

"You won't have to worry about that," he said. "This crooner will know he's been in a race."

I said slowly: "If you race for me, you race only to win. Any of this revenge stuff—"

"Of course," he said. "I'm no beginner."

"Okay." I held out my hand. "It's a deal."

He had some grip.

I saw Jimmy a couple of times. And he didn't look the same. He had lost that—well, whatever it is those cocky guys have. He didn't look natural. Assurance, that's the word.

Jane was at the track every day. And Red kind of thawed out after a while. Being around Jane is a sure cure for a grouch. Not that she was so cheerful. But she's always a sight for the eyes.

He took her to a movie one night. And I didn't like it. Not that I had anything against the kid. I just favored Jimmy; it was just prejudice.

When Jane came home, she said: "Red told me why he wants to win the National. I—" She faltered off. "This is one time when a race seems important." Again she paused. "I—I think I'll see Jimmy tomorrow night. If you see him, will you tell him to drop in?"

"Sure," I said, puzzled. It was a little confused to me. But I didn't ask any questions.

His face lighted up when I gave him the message. "I'll be there." Then: "Was she—I mean, has she missed me?"

"Yea," I said. "Me, too."

He gulped. "Gosh, I hope everything will be all right now."

I wasn't so sure of that.

I will have to confess now, that I did something that evening I never did before in my whole life. I eavesdropped. Like an old maid.

THEY went down into the lobby of our hotel to talk. They picked a quiet corner. I pretended to go over to the cigar counter, but I kind of sauntered back to the shade of a potted palm, and sank into a big leather chair.

She came right to the point. "Red Kern has to win that race, Saturday, Jimmy."

"He'll have to beat me," the lad said.

There was the slightest pause, then Jane said: "Yes, he will have to beat you, Jimmy."

There was another pause, longer. Then Jimmy said: "I don't want to think what I'm thinking, Jane. Not about you."

She explained about Frank's leg then.

Jimmy asked: "What does your dad think about this? Have you told him?"

"Of course not," she said. "He'd have a fit. Dad never asks for quarter."

"Why should Red, then?"

"He hasn't. I'm the one who's asking it, Jimmy. It would take a big man. It's a test, really. Of whether you're a man—or a race-car driver."

"I'm both," he said. "And I only know one way to drive. To win. I don't want to know any other way."

There was another silence, the longest of the three. Then she said: "I won't accept this as final. Maybe neither of you will even finish. But if the time comes, if the end is close and both of you are in front, I'll be waiting for your decision, Jimmy."

He said nothing.

"Don't fail me again," she said.

Then, suddenly, she was standing there, right in front of me, and alone. She asked: "Did you hear—"

I nodded. "I never thought I'd be ashamed of my daughter."

I had hurt her. I could tell by the swift shadow that crossed her eyes.

She said: "Is it important for a man to win a race, if losing it will help another man to walk right?"

"You're making it complex," I said. "It's wrong to throw a race. Way down underneath, it's wrong. What happens can't be helped, or will have to be solved some other way. A thing is wrong or right. A man must do what's right."

She only half believed me, I saw, but even that was more than I expected. She was silent all the way back to the room. Then she said: "Are you going to tell Jimmy?"

I shook my head. "It's his decision. It's a test, really. I hope he doesn't fail me."

Those had been her words.

She winced, just a little, and I was ashamed of myself. I put an arm around her. "Honey, you leave men's problems to the men. That kid's been through a bad week. Don't make it any worse."

She looked at me fully then. "I hope he throws it," she said.

Women . . .

THIS track at Arco is a darb. Dirt, but packed like concrete for the early part of the race. It's banked nicely, and the stands are modern and big. All in all, it's a swell plant and they make money. Especially on the National.

All the boys were there. Boys who had finished in the money at Indianapolis on Memorial Day, and boys who had yet to see the 500. All kinds of boys, and ninety-eight per cent of them Grade-A. This was always a race.

Apex had three cars entered and I was kept busy. I saw very little of Jimmy, and what I did see wasn't pleasant. For he wasn't the Jimmy of old. He was grim and quiet.

Red matched his grimness and added a touch of bad temper. But I could understand that. These young fellows make a personal thing of racing.

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I got my first suspicion at Jimmy's qualifying time. It was slow for him. And though I loved my daughter, I hoped he didn't love her enough to do what she had asked.

Red won the pole position. He won it by hanging up a new world record for the dirt-track mile. Frank had been right about Red.

The stands began to fill early. The day was perfect, damp enough to lay the dust and improve carburetion, but bright enough for the crowd. It was to be a day they would remember.

Jimmy was back, way back in the fifth row. There were ten rows, two cars in a row. These were the topnotchers. Jane had been foolish, in a way, to think that Red and Jimmy would naturally battle it out for the lead. Until today, I had been just as foolish.

I wasn't so sure about Jimmy now.

The stock pacemaker was out there now, the starter was unfurling his flag. The cars were coughing into life, and the smell of castor rose on the warm air.

The pace rose as they hit the stretch, and the motor noise whined higher. The stands were up. The green flag dipped.

RED'S foot must have hit the floor as the flag dropped. For he left his flanking car like a rocket and bored the bend alone. And he was moving. He had a fifty-foot lead in the back stretch.

He kept his lead for the next ten laps, increased it to a hundred feet. The second car was another of our entries and our third job rode fifth. It was a good start for Apex.

Jimmy was back in the ruck. He was riding the groove, and seemed content.

From behind the infield fence, Jane said: "I guess he's doing what I wanted him to." But her voice didn't sound happy.

I just looked at her and went over to check the water buckets.

Red carried his lead into the fifteenth mile, the twentieth. Two had already dropped out, and one clunker was lapped. But the rest of the field was still singing, and I waited for a challenge.

It came in the next lap. Jerry Barton's streamliner had been moving up from the four spot steadily. He made his bid in the grandstand alley.

For two laps, they fought it out in a slam-bang, hub-rubbing dog fight. But Jerry wasn't the one. Red rode into the twenty-fourth mile all alone again.

Our own men shouldn't challenge until near the end. It looked like the next few miles would be quiet. But I was wrong.

Some local kid had climbed up, to take Jerry's place as he dropped back. And the kid made up in courage what he lacked in skill. Wildly, they paced it out, and the stands were up every second. I hope I never live to see three laps as crazy as those again. But Red beat him down.

The thirtieth lap went by, the fortieth. Things were quiet, almost monotonous. Apex was riding one, two and four now and I began to figure my bonus.

I noticed, then, that Jimmy had climbed up into seventh place. I looked back at Jane, and she had seen it too. Her eyes were strange.

At sixty laps, the fun began. My Two car decided he'd had enough of Red's dust. The Three car didn't like the Apex monopoly. And from the ruck, another beginner decided to make good.

For ten laps, they mixed it. The dust was like a hailstorm, fanning out from the churning wheels, the motor noise was straight from Hell. The rest of the field just hugged the fence and prayed.

Apex Number Two fell back first.

Red and the other two cars fought it out, three abreast on the stretches and two-one into the bends. All but two cars in the field were lapped. One was the Apex. The other was Jimmy Boyle's.

Then the newcomer dropped back. And the second Apex decided that twenty-five hundred wasn't enough for *his* life. The other Apex was out of it for the moment.

Jimmy slipped in.

It was magic. He passed the Two car in the dusty south before my pilot knew he was there. And he moved up on Red.

FOR five laps, they engaged in a little preliminary, upping the pace enough to make it exciting, but not enough to break any records.

Then, at the ninety-mile marker, they threw away the brakes. It was a duel I will never see again. They were both young, and strong and skillful and fear was just another four-letter word. They went crazy.

The track was what any dirt track would be after ninety miles. Pure poison. Still, they poured it in.

Then, as they hurtled by for the ninety-fifth lap, a laggart swung wide on the furrowed south. And both cars were boring into that haze, fighting for the rail.

Red had the groove, and he kept it. The laggart loomed in Jimmy's path.

Jimmy swung wide, slued, teetered toward the outer rail. A split second he poised on the brink of death.

Then he swung clear. But Red had the lead, almost a quarter lap. With five to go. It was Red's race.

At least I thought it was. But Jimmy was hot today.

To win, though, he couldn't go around Red. For that took time. It took more time than there was between those two cars. They were peas in a pod. It would take something else, and I knew the trick. He would have to press Red, force him wide on one of those turns, and sneak through below. It would take a bit of doing.

He began to do just that as they flashed past the blue flag. But he only had two bends to do it in. Red hugged his groove around the first.

Jimmy made his bid in the back line. His motor was souped to its absolute limit. So was Red's. They rocketed toward that curve with nothing but their wrists between them and immortality.

And a millionth of a second before they hit it, Jimmy slowed. Just back to Red's deck, just far enough back to slide through if Red's wrists weren't up to his.

They weren't.

Red went high, slued, just for a second—and Jimmy slipped by. He must have smelled the paint on that lower rail. But he made it.

And as he thundered past that checkered flag, I could see the smile back on his grimy face. Apex had lost but I wasn't too sorry. Jane, too, was smiling. She must have seen the light. She was in the crowd that milled around to congratulate him when he idled in.

We were still there, the three of us, when most of the others had gone.

"I got word from the hospital this noon," I said, "that somebody had sent a check to that specialist, a check for twenty-five hundred. He's flying here now."

Jimmy colored.

"When I sold you that car," I said, "you only had five hundred left. You didn't make two grand since."

He smiled—the old Jimmy. "The check won't be back to town until Monday. I knew I could cover then."

"Only first place would do it," I said.

He looked surprised. "Why, sure. What else is there, besides first place?"

"Men," Jane said. But she didn't look mad any more.

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Northward Rails

By Frank Bunce

Harris spiked the attachment on the end of a rail; then, "Don't come any closer, Craig," he warned

JEFFREY CRAIG heads directly into a mess of violence and deceit when he arrives in the little Wisconsin settlement of Lakehead in June, 1855. The settlement has railroad fever—but not for the road he plans to build.

His old friend MIKE SLANE—raw, uncouth, and loyal—now a state senator, has chartered a road with Craig as president and chief engineer. The right of way starts at Junction City eighty miles south of Lakehead; terminates at any point on the shore of Lake Superior, three hundred and fifty miles north. With it goes a chance at the biggest land grant in the history of the Northwest.

But WILLIAM BARSTOW, a crooked manipulator, is on the ground ahead of Craig with a project to lay iron in a line paralleling this grant. With the assistance of LUKE GRANVILLE, Madison banker, and MILT WYCLIFFE, publisher of Lakehead's paper, he has succeeded in persuading the local settlers to mortgage their farms and finance the railroad he intends to exploit but never to build.

In spite of the distrust and resentment of the settlers for him, Craig starts to work on his own road at once; sends young TOM DURSTINE north to survey the line; and himself goes home to Boston, where he borrows a quarter of a million dollars from his brother, EBEN CRAIG, in order to finance the building.

Trouble strikes quickly. Durstine is attacked and the survey records stolen by persons unknown; but Craig is sure that Barstow is responsible. Nevertheless he is persuaded to accept a proposition by Barstow: trade his own charter for that of the Kaukalin and Western, a line controlled by Barstow and branching northeast from Craig's present line of survey.

It looks like a good trade: for with the K. & W. Barstow agrees to lend three thousand tons of rail iron, and make reciprocal arrangements for mutual use of each road by the other's cars. But there is a joker in the deck.

AFTER considerable delay Barstow starts to build his projected people's railroad along the line of Craig's old charter; but after construction is extended a little way north of Lakehead the work bogs down, and the settlers are told that the road will have to be thrown into receivership. They are reassured, however, with Barstow's plan for "reorganization," in which they will put up more money and buy back their own road—to get their money back as soon as the road starts producing.

And here is Barstow's hidden joker. By the law of the time, a company thrown into receivership and reorganized retains the privileges but escapes the obligations of the original company. Thus the agreement to lend Craig three thousand tons of rail iron for the K. & W. is void—and Craig is out on a limb.

It is at this point that Jeffrey Craig tosses his bombshell. When the people's road is put up for sale, with the expectation that Barstow's group will buy it back again, Craig himself bids in with an offer of $528,473.61—and gets the road. He gives his draft for that amount—which is exactly $500,000 more than he has in the bank.

When Mike Slain learns this he frantically pursues Craig to Chicago, where Craig is calmly waiting out the

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last three days before his draft will clear the bank. Slaine points out that giving an uncovered draft for the railroad is a penitentiary offense; but Craig clings to the hope that Barstow will still show up with a renewal of an offer once made to lend him half a million dollars.

And on the last day Barstow does show up—with Granville, Wycliffe, and Wycliffe's niece ANN.

THIS complicates Craig's problem. Ann, fascinated by Barstow, has backed the financing of his road with a pledge of the property left by her father, the late Judge David Wycliffe, whose name is still highly respected in Lakewood. A lovely young woman, she has already dramatized and accentuated the bitter rivalry between Barstow and Craig.

Now Craig learns from her that Barstow has asked her to help persuade Craig to give up the people's railroad that he has bought and named the Wisconsin Northern; but she adds that she is still trying to keep an open mind as to the honesty of Craig's business dealings.

Then, just seventeen minutes before closing time at the bank—where Craig's draft has already arrived—Barstow sits down to talk business: "Craig, let's quit bluffing. You want five hundred thousand dollars. You could scarcely have raised a fifth of that sum."

With the last remaining minutes ticking off the threat of a penitentiary sentence, Craig calmly replies, "I haven't raised any." . . .

CHAPTER XVIII

FIFTY-FIFTY FOR TROUBLE

HE SPOKE with an apparent candor that matched Barstow's own; and looking from one to another of them, Slane felt, even in spite of his anxiety, the thrill of one watching a game played by masters.

Barstow said: "I don't have to remind you that you're in a serious position, Craig. You know what will happen if you don't get that money by the time your draft gets here. As I compute it, that draft should arrive some time today."

"I thought so, too," said Craig. "But we were both wrong. It arrived yesterday; though I have until two o'clock today to raise the necessary funds."

Barstow consulted his watch. "Fourteen minutes. You're a remarkable man, Craig. Most men would be in a panic, with no more time than that to raise so large a sum. But to look at you, one would think you were quite sure of getting it."

"I am," said Craig. "You see, I know I have something you want as badly as I want the five hundred thousand dollars—and you have only fourteen minutes to get it, too. After that, it's not for sale."

Barstow nodded approvingly. "Very shrewd reasoning. It is true you have something I want, and to get it I am prepared to help you out of the hole you're in. I'll give you five hundred thousand for your K. and W. railroad and a nine-tenths interest in the Wisconsin Northern. The agreement on the latter road would, of course, remain secret. You would continue in nominal control of it."

"The Northern isn't for sale," said Craig. Barstow raised his eyebrows, in sardonic inquiry, and he qualified: "Not within the next twelve or thirteen minutes, at least. Of course, by waiting until my draft had been turned back, and the sale declared void, you could buy it back—but openly, on behalf of your stockholders."

Barstow made no answer. He didn't want that sale declared void. With the K. and W. he wanted the Northern—but not openly; not all of it. Just nine-tenths under a private agreement, leaving its nominal ownership to Craig. Thus he would have unlimited opportunities for plunder, under cover of another man's name.

He sat eyeing Craig covertly from under lowered lids, as the moments ticked off a swift contraction of the slim margin of time remaining, searching for a crack in Craig's armor. He took two cigars from his pocket. He gave one to Craig; moistened, punctured the end of another and put it into his mouth, and then waited.

Craig struck a match. He held the flame flat and unwaveringly against the end of Barstow's cigar. He held it a moment there, but when no glow appeared on the cigar, he said, with a faintly ironic smile:

"You might try drawing on it, Barstow."

Barstow flung down the cigar, with a curse. He mastered himself quickly, however; said quietly as ever: "All right, Craig. You win. I'll give you five hundred thousand for the K. and W."

HE SUMMONED a waiter, called for pen and ink. From an inside pocket, he produced several documents. Three he glanced at briefly and replaced; from the fourth he detached a blue slip of paper before handing it on to Craig.

"My draft for $500,000," he said. "I'll sign it when you sign that conveyance."

While Slane's taut nerves screamed protest, Craig read the document over with as much deliberation as if time were of no consequence. Apparently satisfied, he signed it, accepted the draft which Barstow signed in turn. While Slane was affixing a wobbly witness's signature to the conveyance, Craig handed the draft over to a waiter.

"Have this taken to the Mitchell bank and deposited for me. Don't waste any time. It has to be there in four minutes." He turned back to Slane, smiling. "It's all right now, Mike. You can faint, or whoop, or get drunk, or whatever it is you've been aching to do for days."

Slane said faintly: "If it's all the same to you, I'll jest set here an' breathe." He breathed none too freely even now. In the air was a tension that told him neither man conceded that play was over.

Barstow said: "I suppose you'll be going back north, Craig?"

"Yes," Craig said. "I'll take the Northwestern short-line passenger to Junction City, and one of my own trains from there."

"I'm taking the same train. Three-five, I believe it leaves the station here." They rose; and both went to the lobby desk, called for pen and paper, wrote telegrams. But with his own message written, Barstow held onto it, looking thoughtful.

"Craig," he said, "I'm going to let you see the message I'm sending. After reading it, you may decide not to send yours. I'm wiring Sheriff Al Preston, of Lakehead county, to collect a posse of fifty men and post them at North Junction, where the K. and W. joins your Wisconsin Northern, to see to it that nobody intrudes upon my right of way. Am I right in thinking you'll not care to send your message now?"

"No," Craig said. "You're as far wrong as you were in guessing the nature of my message. I'm wiring Hauck, my general manager, to get together fifty of my men and post them at North Junction to see to it that nobody intrudes upon my right of way—the Northern. That's hardly what you thought I'd say, is it?"

"No. That isn't. I thought—" Barstow shrugged. "I'll see you at the station, then. Three-five."

. . . Slane was barely able to restrain himself until the door of Craig's room was closed behind them. Then he burst out:

"Jeff, for the love o' Lucindy, tell me what this 's all about! If you don't, I'm goin' to bust."

Craig unpacked lace boots, jean pants, a flannel shirt and mackinaw; began stripping off and tossing into a satchel his frock coat, frilled shirt, collar and cravat.

"Mike," he said "you remember those contracts Barstow

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and I signed when he turned over the K. and W. charter to me. Well, they're no longer worth the paper they're written on. When the Northern went into receivership, all its obligations were obliterated, including the obligations assumed in those contracts."

"I don't see what that has to do with Barstow orderin' out a posse an' you a gang o' fifty men," Slane complained.

"You will, if you'll go back over the whole deal, and fit the pieces together. It will give you something to do."

CHAPTER XIX

KNOCK THE MAN DOWN

THE short-line passenger that ran once daily to Junction City was made up of a bell-stacked engine; a flat car for the wood it burned; and a single coach, partitioned into a mail room at the front, a passenger compartment to the rear. Cold air sifted through its badly joined windows, chilling Craig and Slane, in a seat in front, while Barstow, Wycliffe, and Ann sweltered in rear seats by a big iron stove.

It was twilight when the train set them down at Junction City. Near the turnout switch, where the Northern joined the M. and M., a coach and engine waited, pointed north. The engineer raised a hand in greeting, which Craig returned in kind. Barstow looked keenly up into the man's face, passing him, with Wycliffe and Ann.

"K. and W. man," he said.

"Not any more," said Craig.

Barstow let Ann and her uncle precede him into the coach, while he stood back to examine the train. "K. and W. rolling stock."

"Not any more," Craig repeated, and his eyes met Barstow's in level challenge.

There it was again, thought Mike Slane; a hint of the quarrel between the two that might flare into open violence at the end of this run—at North Junction, where a hundred men were congregating.

Slane tried, as the train jolted northward, through a congealing darkness, to get at the cause of that quarrel. Craig had said it concerned the K. and W. contracts. Well, one had bound the two roads to accept each other's rolling stock for handling, and fixed the tariffs. The other had fixed a rental rate on the three thousand tons of rail iron lent by the People's Railway company to the K. and W.—

Craig had come back to poke up the fire in the pot-bellied stove. Slane said: "Set down, Jeff. I got it figured out what you an' Barstow are both after. It's them K. and W. rails."

"What about them?"

"Barstow loaned 'em to you when he owned the Northern. He contracted to let you have them in perpetuity at a fixed rental, but when the Northern went bankrupt, the contract was voided. So when you bought the Northern, you bought the K. and W. rails, too; an' you got the right to take 'em back again, except fer one thing. Barstow owns the right o' way, an' he's gonna claim you can't trespass on it, even to git your own rails."

"He'll claim more than that. He'll claim the rails are his, under the terms of the conveyance I signed. It was neatly worded. Under its provisions, I conveyed to him the charter, the right of way, and 'all existing appurtenances' attached to it. Since I'm now owner of the Northern, which claims the rails, that might be construed to mean I conveyed them too. It would make a nice legal question. Long before it was decided, I'd be broke."

"Mebby," said Slane. "But that ain't near as bad as what might happen to you if you tried to tear up that track in defiance o' Preston an' his posse."

"I know. But I don't think I'll have to defy him," Craig answered. He rose, and walked away, leaving Slane with a new puzzle to unravel. If Craig wasn't going to law, and if he wasn't going to defy that posse, what did he intend to do? And why had he ordered out Hauck and fifty men?

ANN was in a seat by herself. Craig sat down my her. "I'll have the train stopped for you at Lakehead."

She shook her head. "No, don't, please. I'm going on through to North Junction with the rest of you."

Craig said earnestly: "I wish you wouldn't. There's likely to be trouble."

"That's why I insist upon going. If there's to be trouble, I want to see it for myself, so that I can decide who is right and who is wrong. Too many things have happened that I don't understand, because I've been told confusing, contradictory things about them."

She turned her head away, staring stubbornly out of the window. Craig knew that argument would be futile, and left her, to go back and shake up the stove again. The train was slowing for Lakehead when he had finished and sat down by Slane. The engine picked up speed, only to lose it quickly on a grade.

"Five percent grade, maybe six. This is a good railroad I bought," said Craig. He said: "Listen, Mike. I don't want you starting any trouble tonight. Keep your temper; don't swing until you're swung at."

"Huh?" Slane was genuinely startled.

"If there's to be a fight, let Barstow start it. I've got a surprise in store for him, and I don't think he'll like it."

The train conquered the grade, picked up speed. For two or three miles more it went on with joyous abandon, then whistled and slowed for the junction.

Descending from the rear platform, Slane saw two big fires flaring. One was built near the first switch of a big Y, on which Wisconsin Northern trains could either be turned or run on into the K. and W. track. Another blazed a hundred yards or so down the Northern track, near a second switch.

CRAIG walked to the engine and spoke to the engineer. The train started away, turning into the Y. Its bobbing carbide front light picked out a group of men approaching from the farther fire. Hauck and Durstine led them, and their faces looked gaunt and stern. Craig said quickly:

"Everything all right, Hauck?"

"So far," Hauck said, with a significant look at Barstow.

Craig looked at the men behind him. "You've got more than fifty men, Hauck."

"Sixty-two. All I could round up. I wish we had more." The superintendent nodded toward the near fire, where another group had risen from the logs and stumps on which they had been lounging, to bulk black and formidable against the light. "There's seventy, eighty of them. Dan Wells is here, with his hull crew from Number Two."

Barstow interjected: "Wells? What's he doing here?"

Hauck ignored him, went on speaking to Craig: "There's some of them quarrymen too. They don't like this, Jeff, no more than Wells."

"I'll talk to them," said Craig.

He descended the grade bank to the near fire, all the others following closely. The men around it stood in two groups; the larger marshalled behind the malevolent-looking Black Jack Gore, Barstow's bodyguard; the smaller—stocking-capped, mackinawed timber men, for the most part—around the massive figure of Dan Wells.

Craig stopped before the latter. "I want to know what you're here for, Wells. Are you looking for trouble, or aiming to stop it?"

"Neither," said Wells. Tall as Craig was, the other

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topped him by half a head; but he had a perplexed, indecisive look. "All I want is a square deal. If I can get that, there won't be any trouble. If I can't, there'll be plenty."

"What's your idea of a square deal?" asked Craig.

"A chance to get my timber out. I bought four sections up Green Creek, paying a good price for it, because it was near your railroad, that would haul it right to my mills. My friends, Ferguson and Terry here, have bought stone lands there. They've got to have a railroad, too."

"I know," Craig said. "And I'm sorry. But I'm not nearly as sorry as I would be, if I weren't in a position to offer you something in return. I'll give you four sections of new timber land, Wells, if you'll wait a bit; I'll give Terry and Ferguson new stone lands. Better stone, better timber than anything you're giving up, and better served by a railroad. I own the Northern now, and I'm going to build it through the finest timber and granite country in the Northwest."

Wells frowned down at him indecisively. "We've heard a lot about railroad building, late years; but all we've seen is roads started, stopped, traded, destroyed. How do we know you'll build?"

"I'll have to. It's the only way I can make anything. Nobody is mortgaging his property to give me money; I'm living on no one's credit. Think that over, Wells."

Barstow spoke: "Wells, there is something you seem not to have heard. I own the K. and W. now, not Craig; and I'm going to keep it open. That's why I wired Preston to bring a posse here—to keep Craig and his men from stripping it."

"You wasted words and money," Craig told him coolly. "There's nothing left on your right of way worth hauling off."

"What's that?" Barstow swung around to him abruptly.

Gore came forward. "That's right, boss. From Kaukalin down to this Y, there ain't a rail left, there ain't a sleeper or a depot—hell, there ain't even a switch target! The whole works has been torn up an' piled four miles north o' here, at the head o' the rails, ready to go into buildin' her farther. They must 'a' started stripping 'er weeks ago."

"One week ago. About ten minutes after I bought the Northern," Craig corrected. "All you got for your money, Barstow, is a charter and a right of way. And if you'll read over that conveyance, which you drew yourself, you'll see that's all you're legally entitled to."

AT CRAIG'S back Mike Slane swore softly, with delighted fervor. Now he saw with what incredible audacity Craig had played, in a game that seemed audacious enough when it was only a matter of waiting Barstow out.

Craig had turned away from Barstow, to speak to the sheriff: "Preston, I want to know what you're here for. Are you here as Barstow's man, or as sheriff of this county?"

Preston's thin, stooped shoulders straightened. He was a smallish man, with mild, disconsolate eyes and a white mustache, drooped at the ends; but he had pride. He said with spirit: "I ain't anybody's man. I'm here as sheriff to see that trouble don't git started. That's all."

"Good," said Craig. He glanced toward the train. It had made the turn, going up one leg of the Y, backing down the other, to change ends going into the main line. He turned to Barstow. "I'll ask you to get off my right of way—you and all your men. You may either camp on your own land, or take that train south, as you prefer—"

Barstow struck, with amazing speed and force. All the fury and chagrin that had been gathering in him since he had realized how he had been tricked went into that blow. Craig went down, but in falling rolled away, so that the heavy boot Barstow aimed at him missed its mark.

Before the man could try again, Mike Slane struck him from behind. The blow staggered Barstow; but Slane in turn was attacked by Gore, and the two crashed to the ground. Hauck and his men promptly rushed at Gore's crew, but the sheriff was between them, a pistol in either hand.

"Stay right where you are, everybody," he said. His voice was as mild and disconsolate as his eyes, but there was nothing mild about those guns. The light from the fire painted angry red streaks along their thick gray barrels. He looked toward Wells, saw him and his men standing inactive, neutral, then turned one of the guns on Barstow and Craig.

"We won't have no more fightin', gentlemen," he said. Both men looked down the barrel of that gun respectfully, then backed away from each other; and he went on, gently, reasonably, as if addressing squabbling children: "I got to ask you to move, Mr. Barstow. This is Mr. Craig's land, like he said, and he's got a right to ask you to leave."

SLANE rose, just then, from almost under his feet. Gore did not rise. In their struggle, carried on in such intent silence that everyone had forgotten about them, Slane had had luck. He had been the first to get a fist free.

Barstow looked down at Gore. "Somebody carry him to the train." Two of his men obeyed, and the rest straggled off behind them. But Barstow lingered to say to Craig:

"You take this trick. But it's your last. What I gave you a minute ago is only a sample of what you're going to get. Before I'm through, I'm going to break you all up, Craig—physically, financially, every other way."

The sheriff said: "Better come along now, Mr. Barstow"; and the latter looked at the guns in Preston's hands, shrugged, walked off toward the train.

Wells said to Craig: "My men and I will take that train too, if you don't mind. You're staying here, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Craig. "We're camping at the end of the line, where we can watch those rails and sleepers. They'll bear watching until the weather breaks and we can start laying them."

"That shouldn't be long," Wells said, and led his men away to the waiting train.

Craig followed, to give his engineer and trainmen their orders. Turning away from the engine cab, he came face to face with Ann Barstow. Her face, in the bad light from the coach and engine, was very pale, her eyes dark and enormous.

"I came to thank you for bringing me," she said. Her voice was barbed with scorn and fury. "I'm glad I came. Very glad. I saw everything I came to see."

"You saw nothing, actually," Craig answered quietly. "You saw the surface of events, but that's meaningless unless you know what's behind them."

"I know well enough what's behind them. You stole one railroad with a draft for money you didn't have; you sold another, and then stole that too."

She said passionately: "There were thousands of stockholders of that first railroad that you defrauded; there were thousands of others living along the other, who will have to get along without a railroad now. But you don't care about that, do you? You don't care what happens to anybody, so long as you get what you want. I was glad to see you get hit. I hope you get hit again, and hurt as badly as—"

She broke off with a sudden sob, and whirled away from him. At the steps of the coach, Barstow awaited her, and

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she gave him her hand eagerly, as if it offered her escape from something vile and ugly.

CHAPTER XX

BROTHER EBEN'S MEDICINE

ALL the following summer Craig squandered in attempting an impossibility. He borrowed six cars and a locomotive from the M. and M. and ran two trains daily between Junction City and Lakehead; but the experiment only went to prove that the road could never be profitable until it had conquered and filled the northern wilderness.

Half the time Craig's trains, short as they were, ran empty, and their revenues were not adequate even to pay his grading and track-laying crews, which he had to reduce to a handful of men who could afford to wait for wages.

It was November before he finished laying the forty miles of track he had taken from the K. and W., and then the difficulties of his position were multiplied. Between him and the Michigan border were still one hundred and ten miles of wilderness, and he confronted it without money, credit, or rail iron.

Elsewhere, and in other circumstances, he would have found it easy to finance a half-finished railroad with a rich land subsidy waiting its completion. But there were a number of reasons why no reputable capital could be attracted to this road of his.

A basic reason was the distrust of East and West for each other. Investment in Western enterprises was always a long risk, the more so because Westerners held in dark suspicion the very men they sued for assistance. Men honest as daylight in their dealings with fellow Westerners held, with pious sincerity, that it was no sin to defraud an Eastern banker. It was only beating the devil at dice.

As the promoter of any Western road, Craig would have been a suspect; but to make his cause the more hopeless, his railroad was identified with a situation that had already become a national scandal, that might at any time breed open warfare.

The four million dollars' worth of mortgages that had been written against stock in the road had fallen due in June and July of that year; and it was then revealed that instead of being merely hypothecated against credit for the road, they had been sold at very attractive discounts in the East.

Few if any of the mortgagors were willing or able to pay any interest; but when action was taken to foreclose them, by far the greater number refused to yield, uniting into mortgagors leagues for united resistance.

These leagues followed an inevitable pattern. A group of worried men and women met to talk over their plight; they organized and drew up resolutions. Typical of these was a resolution adopted by the Black Creek Mortgagors' League, Ely Nathan, president: "Resolved that we as a free people, united in solemn conclave, possess the right and duty to resist oppression; and resolved further, that the attempt to dispossess us of our homes is oppression of the worst order. Be it therefore resolved, that we shall resist dispossession with every means at our command. . ."

BARSTOW was there, and spoke, commending the resolution: "It's a step in the right direction. But only a step. Resolutions aren't enough, defense plans aren't enough. Join with the Grand State League—a federation of leagues like your own—for united, aggressive action. It will put pressure on the courts to get a just interpretation of the mortgage laws, or if necessary, to get new mortgage laws written into the statute books.

"We'll have our own newspapers, our own lobby and legal staff—the best lawyers available to fight every foreclosure action brought against any of our members."

Ely Nathan said worriedly: "Does that mean we got to raise more money?"

"No. We have enough. We have the money we raised to buy our railroad back; we have the money realized from its sale. All I want from you and your fellow organizations is authority to divert it to this high and holy crusade for the salvation of your homes."

That authority was promptly voted him; but afterward a qualifying thought occurred to some of the leaguers. Ely's father-in-law broached it to him on their way home:

"Half a million dollars was raised to buy that road. Another five hundred an' twenty-eight thousand some odd dollars was realized from the sale of it—over a million, all told. That's a powerful lot o' money, Ely. You thought of that?"

"Yes, I've thought of it. Jest thought of it," Ely said.

"Reckon we oughta see that we get figures on how it's to be spent, Ely."

"Reckon so," said Ely, though without conviction. He had grown distrustful of figures, of late. As one of the committeemen, he had been given access to the company's records, but he could make nothing of them; and in this, he was in no way different from any of his fellows, whether farmers or business men.

But toward the end of the year they had heartening news from Wycliffe's paper, now the official organ of their Grand State League. Acting with unprecedented speed and unanimity, the legislature had passed an act declaring illegal the sale of stock certificates in railroads for anything but cash, and making the provision retroactive, to apply to roads already constructed.

Soon after the judges of two circuits made the new law the basis for opinions dismissing several foreclosure actions brought before them. The cases were appealed to the state supreme court, and while everyone was awaiting its decision, Wycliffe created a diversion with another bit of sensational news. It was headlined:

EXPOSED!

Ebenezer Craig, Banker Brother of Jeffrey Craig, Found Purveyor of Local Mortgages

The body of the article traced $8,000 worth of mortgages to the bank with which Eben was connected.

CRAIG took a copy of the article with him on a trip to Boston in February, and laid it before his brother. Eben winced behind his spectacles, reading that headline.

"They needn't have blazoned my abominable Christian name in that fashion," he complained. "The initials would have been sufficient. I see no point—"

He brightened, however, on reading further. "Really, as a spicimen of unbridled vituperation and picturesque invective, this stands alone. Listen: 'To refer to this Ebenezer Craig as a skunk and a horse thief is to traduce the former, insult the latter. A more telling indictment is contained in these five simple words: *he is a Boston banker.*"

"Western journalism. A comparatively mild sample," Craig said. "What about that charge, Eb? Are you guilty?"

"In a sense I suppose I am. Our bank did handle a few of those mortgages, though I had no direct connection with the transaction. It may help if I tell you we took a thumping loss. We bought at sixty cents on the dollar, sold at fifteen."

"Sold to whom?"

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"Ostensibly to a pair of men with a somewhat piscatorial look and odor, who called themselves the Mortgage Receivers' Association of Chicago; actually, I am convinced, to the same group of jugglers that palmed off the mortgages to us in the first place. They've disposed of at least three million dollars' worth here in the East, to both large investors and small, and now they're getting them back at their own figure. I think you'd find that the same group is behind this recent eccentric legislation that has depressed the value of the mortgages."

"Undoubtedly," said Craig. "I'll look into that angle. But at the moment, my big concern is to get money for my road. By January first I must have it completed and approved as far as the Michigan border, or lose my Wisconsin land grant."

"What about the Michigan grant?"

"I have another year for that. With the money from the sale of Wisconsin lands, I'll have no trouble there—providing, of course, that I get the Wisconsin lands. But now I have to have money."

"I expected that. You ought to have four or five millions, but if I haven't that much, you'll take a hundred thousand, and if I haven't a hundred thousand, you'll settle for a good cigar. Right?"

"You took the words out of my mouth," Craig admitted.

Eben gave him the cigar. "That's all I can spare right now; and it's more than I'd be able to raise for you anywhere else. If you'll accept advice as a substitute, I'd suggest that you look in on Stevenson, the iron man, on your way back west. You know him, perhaps?"

"Only by reputation. He supplied the iron for the Northern, and now he's started some kind of action at law to recover for money he claims is due him. His bill is for something over a million dollars, but he was paid less than a fifth that sum. I haven't bothered to look into the matter very closely, first because his bill seems exorbitant, and second, because he hasn't got a case. When the road went into receivership, it obliterated all such obligations."

"It obliterated its obligations on all properties that were fixed and immovable, in the legal sense, true. But Stevenson's action isn't for money, and it isn't for recovery of any iron fixed to the right of way."

Craig came to attention sharply. "What kind of action is it, then?"

"IT'S for the recovery of a few hundred pounds of rail iron left unused at Junction City." Craig looked at him in puzzled inquiry, but Eben chose to ignore it.

"You'll find a visit most instructive, Jeff, the more so as he's confronted by a problem similar to your own. He's expanding so rapidly that his capital is constantly assuming fixed forms—getting frozen into new plants or extensions of the old ones—but he has solved his problem in rather a novel way."

"What is his method?" Craig asked eagerly.

Eben seemed to ignore this. He said: "You interested me with some figures you quoted a few moments ago. You said Stevenson's bill seemed unreasonable, because it was for a million dollars; but Stevenson does not impress me as an unreasonable man.

"Now, while I've been sitting here talking idly, to no purpose, I've been doing a little figuring; but I'm handicapped by not being much of a mathematician. Perhaps you could help me."

"Gladly."

Eben said: "Railroad iron is currently quoted at around sixty dollars a ton. Sixty-one dollars and thirteen cents, average, to be exact. And most rails now in use vary in weight between twenty and fifty pounds to the running yard, I believe."

"The Northern used forty-pound iron," Craig said.

"Good. That makes it easier. It gives us fifty yards to the ton. Thus, sixty dollars would rail seventy-five feet right of way. I assume your road has two rails?"

"Most railroads do," said Craig.

"I'd take nothing for granted in connection with that railroad . . . Well, sixty goes into one million how many times?"

"Sixteen thousand, six hundred and sixty-six. And seventy-five times 16,666 is 1,249,950—the number of feet of right of way a million dollars will rail. And 1,249,950 divided by 5,280 is 236 miles—"

Craig broke off, said with sudden excitement: "Why, that's almost the distance from Junction City to the Wisconsin border. It's enough to rail a road clear through the state!"

"That's what I was thinking," Emmanuel said gently. "It may be only a coincidence, of course. Perhaps Stevenson was unreasonable. You may be able to tell better when you see him."

"I'll see him," Craig said. "And I'm going to ask him how he's financing himself."

Eben looked mournful. "I was afraid of that. Well, since you're going to find out anyhow, I may as well tell you. He's cut his company up into bits—rolling mills, bridge companies, rail iron company, furnace company, and so on—so that he can circulate funds, on notes, from one company to the other; whereas as one company he could raise nothing, since a company can't issue notes against itself. Naturally, there's a limit to what he or anyone else can garner by this method."

"How much could the Northern garner if it cut itself up into say three companies—the Southern Wisconsin, the Central Wisconsin, and the Northern Wisconsin?" Craig asked.

"Quite a respectable sum, providing the matter were handled intelligently. As I see it you might get enough to pay wages and build grade, or you might get enough to buy rail iron. But not enough for both."

"Money enough for wages will satisfy me. I'll take a chance on getting the iron."

Eben sighed. "Well then, I'll handle the details of floating your new companies, Jeff—but don't forget to drop in on Stevenson."

CHAPTER XXI

LOOK FOR THE IRON LINING

TO CRAIG, calling at Stevenson's Allegheny offices a few days later, the man suggested one of his own furnaces. He had the same square stark lines, the same look of banked potency. He had the long view, and his talk was less of iron than of steel. The cheap steel, of twenty five years in the future.

"We've got to have it—cheap steel—for the things we're going to build. We're on the way to it now. At the moment, though, we're tied up by a three-way patent fight. You've heard about that, I suppose."

"Yes," said Craig. He was studying the other keenly; and what he saw answered a vital question in his mind. He said: "In ten or twenty years, Mr. Stevenson, I'll be interested in steel. Sixty—perhaps eighty, or even one-hundred-pound—rail steel. But at the moment my need is iron. Eight or ten thousand tons of it."

Stevenson's eyes took on a quick, visored look. "That's a big order, Mr. Craig. I'm afraid I couldn't handle it. My problem now is plant expansion, to fiill the orders from my own doorstep—Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania, the South. Everybody's building railroads now."

"I know that," said Craig. "I couldn't reasonably ex-

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pect you to make iron for me on credit. But another possibility has occurred to me. I've heard that you contracted to turn over to the Wisconsin Northern some fifteen thousand tons of rail iron that had originally been ordered by the M. and M. Is that right?"

"Yes," said Stevenson sparsely, and waited.

"How much did you actually furnish them?"

Stevenson answered guardedly: "Why ask me? Aren't the records at the other end available to you?"

"They're available, but I don't think they're accurate. If they're to be believed, you must have charged about $150 a ton for the iron you supplied. They imply, and many people believe, that you're largely responsible for the failure of the road."

"I'm not interested in what kind of a reputation I have in Wisconsin," Stevenson said.

He was being deliberately noncommital, Craig perceived. He decided to shift ground. "You have an action pending against the Northern for half a ton or so of unused iron. I can't believe you're greatly concerned about that insignificant amount. What you're really after is a court decision establishing your right to all iron which you supplied to the Northern, but which they did not use. And that, no doubt, amounts to considerably more than half a ton."

"You're a good guesser, Mr. Craig. Now perhaps you can go on and guess, too, exactly how much is involved—and where it is to be found," said Stevenson.

He was impasive as one of his own furnaces, but behind the visored surfaces of his eyes something stirred, waited warily. He too was seeking information; and to Craig that fact was the key to everything he had come to learn.

"I can guess how much iron is involved," he said. "It comes close to being as much as I must have to build to the Michigan line—seven or eight thousand tons. Where it is, I don't know. But you don't either."

"You are a very good guesser, Mr. Craig," said Stevenson, softly.

"I CAN find that iron," Craig went on. "I can find it for myself alone; or I can find on behalf of both of us. I'd pay you ten percent down on it—$50,000—and the remainder in two years, for an immediate transfer of title. That's my top offer, and if it isn't good enough, I'm on my own. I've got to have that iron."

"I've got to have it, too," Stevenson said. "I have an immediate cash market for it, and I need money now, not in two years. I'll find it myself, Mr. Craig; but I'd better not find it in your possession. I'll tell you something. My action to determine my right to it is no longer pending. It was decided last week, in my favor. Do you understand what that means?"

"It means the iron is legally yours."

"It means more than that. It means that anyone that appropriates it for himself is responsible in both civil and criminal law. Do you happen to know the penalty for grand larceny, Mr. Craig?"

"Yes." Craig stood up. "It's pretty stiff. It's about the same penalty I faced last winter when I bought the Northern with a draft money I didn't have."

"There is a difference." Stevenson rose too. "When you bought the Northern you had a fighting chance. But you'd have none if you laid hands on that iron, whether you attached it to your right of way or not. This court decision settles that. Every yard of it you laid would only bring you a yard nearer the penitentiary."

Craig said musingly: "Some day, Mr. Stevenson, someone is going to try to define a railroad builder, but he'll have a hard time of it. He'll have to fall back upon the conclusion that they were half rogues, half fanatics. All I can think about is getting my railroad built. Whatever has to be done to get it built, I'll do, without bothering too much about nice questions of right and wrong, without much concern for consequences. I suppose I'm touched."

"Perhaps," said Stevenson. "I suppose I am, myself. All I can think about is iron. I want all that rail iron, to sell for cash, so that I can build more furnaces and make more iron; and I'm going to insist that you don't meddle with it. Good day, sir."

"Good day," Craig said, and left.

THREE days later he was in Chicago, making guarded inquiries at the railroad and harbor offices. They had to be guarded, for he suspected that he might be under surveillance; and the following day, in Milwaukee, when he began to observe with suspicious frequency a bulky red-faced man in a coat too small for him and a hat too big, he was sure of it. Before leaving for Madison next morning, he took some precautions to elude the man, and succeeded in reaching the capital unaccompanied.

He told Mike Slane what Eben had said about the Mortgage Receivers' Association. "If we could prove a connection between that concern and Barstow, I think we'd have him. There must be some law against manipulations of that kind—conspiracy to defraud I believe it would be called, in law."

"Likely is. They's laws against practically everything else. They's laws against spittin'," Mike said, and spat. "I'll look into it."

"While you're about it, you might look for some way to muzzle the state inspectors, too. Barstow's in the East now, doing some lavish spending at the expense of his Grand State League; but he'll be back to strike at me, when he thinks the time is ripe, and I have a hunch he'll try to do it through them. He had no difficulty in getting them to make trouble when he wanted to check the progress of his own road, and it would be no harder to persuade them to do the same for mine. Can't you start some kind of an investigation to keep them quiet?"

"I'll do better'n that. I'll git 'em abolished. I got votes enough owin' me, on swap, to do it easy." Mike's one good eye began to gleam. "I'll make a speech about 'em. I been thinkin' fer some time now I oughta make at least one senate speech, bein' as I'm the duly appointed voice o' the people."

He made his speech two days later, but Craig was too busy to go and hear it. He was off on a paper hunt for that missing iron, dividing his time between the state-land office at Mineral Point and the hydrographic survey office in Madison. Calling on him one evening, a week or so after his arrival, Slane found him immersed in a sea of charts and surveyor's field notes.

Slane looked at them dubiously. "I can't see how they're goin' to help you, Jeff. Fer that matter, I ain't never got this iron deal quite straight. What you lookin' fer?"

Craig pushed away enough of the documents so that he could light a pipe without setting himself afire. He was coatless, his powerful forearms bared, a glow of subdued excitement on his lean, finely whittled New England face.

"To get it straight, go back to the beginning," he said. "Barstow contracted with Stevenson for fifteen thousand tons of rail iron, paying one hundred thousand dollars down, another hundred thousand a few months later. This was less than one fifth of the total contract price, but when the road went into receivership, Stevenson could recover nothing of the seven or eight thousand tons already affixed to the right of way.

"A recent court decision, however, gives him the right to recover all that was delivered, but not used. By my figures, that's another seven or eight thousand tons; and

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since Stevenson obviously doesn't know where it is, it follows that Bartsow must have hidden it somewhere. He couldn't have sold it without Stevenson's knowledge."

"Somewhere's a big word," Slaine said doubtfully.

"It looks big at first, but it can be shaved down tremendously. In the first place, I found that while all fifteen thousand tons of it had been cleared from Chicago, only a little more than half that amount was ever received in Milwaukee, to be taken by rail to Junction City. The rest must be cached somewhere along Lake Michigan."

"That's still big. Michigan's a wide, long lake."

"I know. And that's why I've been hurrying into the land office records and these records of the hydrographic survey. Imagine, Mike, that you were the one trying to hide twenty or thirty barge loads of iron; what kind of place would you choose for it?"

SLANE pondered this. "Wal—since it's loaded barges, you'd have to land it at some bay or lagoon or wide deep river. Then it oughta be outa the way o' settlements an' traveled roads, an' fairly well screened with timber . . . . I see what you mean, Jeff. But there must be hundreds o' places like that on Lake Michigan."

"There are sixty-seven. That's all. I have that on authority of the hydrographic survey. And then there's another factor to narrow it down still more. The land office records show that about all of the lands around the bays and the lower reaches of the rivers have been bought up by the timber men and are being either explored or worked by them. And nobody would dump seven or eight thousand tons of iron on another man's land."

Mike was as puzzled as ever. "That makes it look like there wouldn't be no place to hide it."

"There is just one place that seems to fit all the requirements." Craig unrolled one of the charts. "Up here on the west shore of the lake, forming a part of the boundary between Wisconsin and Upper Michigan, is the Menominee River.

"At high water, it's navigable to steamers for forty miles; and thirty miles up from its mouth is a big tamarack swamp, so treacherous and difficult of access that not even the surveyors bothered to penetrate it. They've just left it a blank space on the map.

"No one, of course, lays claim to it; and any number of barges could have been towed into it on a spring freshet, and moored, and left to go aground when the water level fell. For eleven months of the year, the cargoes would be as safe as if they were stored in a padlocked warehouse—and a great deal more difficult to travel."

"Does seem a likely place," Slane agreed. But he still looked dubious. "Suppose you do find it, Jeff, what you gonna do with it? Stevenson 'll have you in jail 'fore you git a mile of it laid."

"No, he won't. Not the way I'm going to lay it."

"How you gonna lay it?"

"Wrong end to."

Slane looked at him incredulously, but Craig said no more, rising to gather up clothes, pipes, and other personal effects, jamming them into his battered satchels preparatory to making an early morning start for Junction City and the north.

CHAPTER XXII

THE AX AND THE SHERIFF

WHEN Craig arrived at his destination with eighteen men, some ten days later, he knew he had a difficult job on his hands.

That swamp was shaped roughly like a closing hand, with the Menominee river for a wrist line, a great frozen slough for a thumb, and several other sloughs reaching out like gouging fingers into the flat low ridges that defined it on three sides.

Between the sloughs were areas of deep marsh, embracing some thirty or forty square miles; and to try to explore it at this season, when the ice was thinning, on the verge of cracking up, was to invite disaster. But they had to have that iron, if it was there, while there was water enough to float it off.

They split into groups of two and three men, each working over a measured area. And they learned to read the swamp, so they could avoid going over the same ground and at the same time not miss any. To certain landmarks they gave names: the big slough was "the Thumb"; a certain patriarchial old tamarack was "Gran' pop"; a hump of land a mile or so in from the river was the "Buffalo Back". And so on.

Toward the end of March, the river went out. Soon after came the first spring rains, melting the last of the ice in the swamp.

Craig had pole rafts made, and from these the party continued its explorations; feverishly now, for time was of enormous consequence. They had to get out that iron before the freshets subsided—and before Stevenson could act to block them.

Young Tom Durstine marveled that Craig could persist week after week, as his chances dwindled with the dwindling river. Durstine was sure they had lost when a man they had sent out to Green Bay for supplies returned to tell how he had been stopped on the back trip and questioned by the sheriff at Menekaunee, an Indian village near the mouth of the river.

Craig listened attentively while the man told his story, then questioned:

"Anybody with him—any white man?"

"Yeah. Fella named Harris. Big fella, red-faced, city clothes."

"Stevenson's man," Craig said positively. The description tallied with that of the man he had shaken off in Milwaukee. It was inevitable that the other should have picked up his trail again; no party of nineteen men could camp two months on the edge of a swamp without exciting comment. Durstine expected him to call the hunt off, but he ordered it continued; and next day the iron was found.

THERE were thirty-two barges, all told; each of which, Craig and Durstine computed, was loaded with about two hundred and fifty tons of rail iron.

Seven or eight thousand tons—there was their railroad. But the problem remained of getting it out. The barge fleet was moored in a pool a good three miles from the river, and between were some areas of drying marsh that would not have floated a feather. Durstine said dismally that night, across a fire:

"We're licked, Jeff. We're two weeks late. The only way to get that iron out now would be to build a corduroy and skid it out to the river, rail by rail, as you'd skid logs. And that would take months."

"I know. And we haven't months to waste." Craig sat frowning into the fire, gaunt, unkempt, filthy from his weeks in the swamp, his eyes enormous in his drawn, stubbled face; and Durstine was tortured with pity for him. The project had been a desperate gamble from the start; it was hopeless now.

Durstine dozed, and when he came awake an hour or so later, Craig was intent upon charts from one of his saddle bags. He had a different look now, of restrained excitement.

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"Tom," he said, "you'd better stretch out and get some sleep. I'll ask you to start downriver tomorrow, early. Don't stop at Menekaunee, no matter who hails you. I want you to make the best time you can."

"To where?" asked Durstine.

"To Hauck, at North Junction. Have him bring up men and provisions—all he can lay hands on. You hire a grouser and four barges, and bring three flat cars and a locomotive back with you. Provisions, too."

Durstine looked at him incredulously. "Jeff, you're joking. What do you want of a locomotive and flat cars; what do you want of a grouser? A grouser's no good in a river."

"This won't be a river when I get through it. I'm damming it, Tom, to back water into this swamp, so I can float that iron off. Then I'm grousing it upstream—"

"Upstream?"

"Upstream as far as the navigable water holds out. I think I can make ten or eleven miles at least—across the county line into unorganized territory, where no sheriff can touch me until I've built back to the Lakehead county line. And by then, I'll have my railroad built all across Wisconsin."

Craig grinned at the startled look on the other's face. "I know. It's building a railroad wrong end to—south, instead of north. But when you get used to the idea, is there anything so preposterous about it?"

Durstine said, when he was able to speak: "But—you'd have to haul everything three or four hundred miles. Men, materials—"

"The heaviest materials would be already there; rail iron, sleepers. As for the men, they'll be so far from saloons we won't lose nearly so many. Supplies are a problem, but we'll solve it. Until June or July we can bring them up this river; after that we'll have to haul by wagon, north from the railhead along the stake line." Craig grinned, said cheerfully: "Any more objections?"

"One. A big one," Durstine said. "I'll have to bring that grouser back past Harris and his sheriff, and they aren't blind. They're going to wonder what we're up to. Maybe they'll be curious enough to come up with us."

"I'm quite sure they will," said Craig. "But let's worry about that later. Get back as soon as you can, then stand off at Point Noire, at the mouth of the river, until I come aboard." Durstine had risen, started down toward the river; Craig said: "Where are you going?"

"Downriver. You said start early, didn't you?" Durstine answered.

NINETEEN days later, he was thrusting down his grouser pole into two fathoms of mud and water off Point Noire, at the mouth of the river. He had scarcely anchored when a bateau drew away from shore; and in a few minutes, Craig and two other men came aboard. Ten days of hard, slogging labor had built the dam and a lock to raise the grouser, and he had been waiting at the Point almost a week.

The day after Durstine's departure he had had a visit from Harris and the Oconto county sheriff. They had suspected he had found the iron, and they wanted to attach it. Craig had given them a raft, told them to look around for themselves. When they failed to return by dark, he and the men went hunting them; found them at two o'clock next afternoon.

"They're not still there?" asked Durstine anxiously.

Craig laughed. "Not on your life. They've had enough of that swamp. They're back at Menekaunee with a log boom stretched across the channel to keep us from going through without their knowledge. I've asked them to remove it, but I doubt that they have."

Mike Slane poked his head up, just then, from the engine room companionway. He had put pressure on the lumber lobby to get a grouser for Durstine, then had insisted upon coming along as engineer. He was smudged and oil-soaked, and he leered insultingly at Craig, still gaunt and shabby, but clean-shaven, scrupulously clean.

"Prissy!" he grumbled.

Craig gave him back stare for stare. "The People's Choice! How's your wood supply, Mike?"

"All right. We loaded at Washington Island." Slane came on deck. He wiped a hand on his pants and offered the hand to Craig. "Tom, here, told me what you was up to, but I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe anybody in his right mind would try anything like this."

"I've never claimed to be in my right mind," said Craig. "What's happening down state, Mike?"

"Plenty. The supreme court throwed out the law declarin' the railroad mortgages illegal, but we got another pendin' requirin' jury trials in all mortgage foreclosure cases. That'll be throwed out, too, but it gains time. I been findin' out things about that Mortgage Receivers' Association; but to cinch things I need the testimony o' somebody on the inside. An' you know, Jeff, I think I'm goin' to git it."

"From whom?" asked Craig.

"From Milton Wycliffe. He's about ready to crack. He don't like seein' Barstow goin' around with his niece, but how kin he stop it without tellin' things that involve him too? I dropped him a hint that if he's any man at all, he'll come through with the truth. An' sooner or later, he's goin' to."

Craig said, in a slow, careful voice: "Are she and Barstow together a great deal?"

"They was, plenty, last fall. Now he's East; but when he gits back—" Slane broke off, suddenly aware that Craig's face had grown hard and bleak; he said quickly, in embarrassment: "Wal, what we waitin' fer? Mornin'?"

"We'll start now." Craig went into the grouser wheelhouse, Slane back down to the engine room. Durstine and his deck crew of three lifted the grouser pole, and the tug got under way, pulling its tow of four barges easily, without strain.

NIGHT was near; and due ahead, as the tug went into the river, the log and bark shanties of Menekaunee were dark against an obscuring sky. A small sawmill stood close to the water's edge, and just below it, a stringer boom of peeled logs made a yellow line across the stream.

Craig snubbed the tug against a mill boom full of saw logs, running parallel with the left shore. He got out upon it, and called to a group of men on the bank:

"Harris!"

The man came closer. He was thickly, powerfully made, and he walked with an aggressive truculence. He was still wearing his tight coat and loose hat, and a violent waistcoat.

"Yeah?" he said curtly.

"I thought I told you to take out that stringer. Neither you nor your hired man, the sheriff, has any authority to block this river."

"Now, here. We'll not have such talk." The sheriff's voice was high with indignation. He too came down to the water's edge, trailed without enthusiasm by four or five breeds from the village. His clothes all hung loosely on him, flapping as he walked, accentuating the impression of pretentious futility that he produced. He said, "I let Mr. Harris put that boom there, to stop you from sneakin' past us in the night. I've heard o' you an' your tricks, Craig. I want to see what you're up to—what you got aboard."

"You can go to hell," Craig said. "You're a sheriff, not

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a customs officer." He turned to his crew, bunched at the tug rail. "Hand me an ax, somebody."

"Craig, don't you go tryin' to cut that stringer," the sheriff warned.

He had a gun, and he flourished it. Craig said, accepting the ax that was handed him: "Mike, is there a gun aboard?"

"Sure is," said Slane promptly, and brought his hands up above the level of the tug rail. They clutched a long-barreled Sharps rifle.

"Fine. Take a bead on those gentlemen on the bank, and if any of them fires on me, shoot him, no matter who he is, or whether or not he hits me. Is that clear?"

"Clear as noon, Jeff," Slane said, delightedly, and brought the rifle to bear.

Ax in hand, Craig started up the mill boom to the stringer. The sheriff looked at him, looked at Slane's leveled rifle and into the eye behind it, then let his own gun sag helplessly.

Harris turned on him. "Damn you, are you going to let them bluff us out?" The sheriff gulped, but made no move, and Harris abruptly leaped down upon the mill boom, lunging to intercept Craig. In his rage, however, he overreached himself. Those logs were loose, and he was no river man. One turned under his feet, and he clawed for another. That spun too; and he careened and fell into the water.

A great shout of laughter arose from both tug and bank. His collapse was a joke that the breeds could enjoy, too. Before he could pull himself up and try again, Craig had found the staple that joined the stringer chain to the mill boom, and hacked it out. The chain lost tautness abruptly; the string of logs kinked and drifted away down river.

Craig jumped back up onto the tug. He signaled Durstine to raise the grouser pole; and Harris, a dripping, ludicrous figure, could do no more than shake his fist and howl threats after them as they pulled away upstream.

CHAPTER XXIII

NOW YOU SEE 'EM; NOW YOU DON'T

FOR several miles the river ran broad and deep between banks heavily forested with pine and hardwoods. There finding a channel was easy; but farther on, where the river bent for a long sweep northward, crumpling into a multitude of confused segments, the hazards of navigation increased.

Still farther, a maze of sandbars appeared, and they had to use the grouser. When the tow scraped on one of the bars, the tow cable would be loosened,the tug run out to the end of it and the grouser pole jammed deep down into the sand bottom. The engine's power would be transferred to the winch, and the tow yanked free.

The moment it was off, the tow line would be snubbed fast, the grouser lifted, the tug gotten under way immediately, to take advantage of every ounce of forward motion. Sometimes they would gain as much as two or three hundred yards before the operation had to be repeated; sometimes not ten.

The moon was high when they finally fought free of the sandbars and moved on around another great bend into a straight, narrower stretch that gave Durstine his first view of the dam. To him it looked like nothing more than some ancient fort; and to make the illusion more complete, a garrison of men appeared promptly at their approach, some remaining on the dam, others hurrying to a log pier several hundred yards below it.

They used the towlines to make the tow fast, and then Craig guided the grouser into the lock. The lower gate was closed, and the crew manned a winch controlling the upper gate, wrenching it open to let the river water in. The lock had about half filled when a man approached Craig excitedly.

"Somebody comin' upriver. Two, three canoes," he said.

"That so?" said Craig, quite casually, and went on directing the work of storing supplies on the grouser, telling off a crew to guard the tow.

The canoes scraped into the pier just as he got aboard the tug, and Harris appeared above the dam while they were moving away from it. He carried one end of a canoe, the sheriff another; and when they saw the tug moving out of the lock they hastily put it into the water and set off in pursuit. A second canoe, carrying three breeds, followed less enthusiastically.

Craig paid no attention to them. He went on a few hundred yards upstream, then put the wheel hard down to go left, down a twisting lane of tamarcks, half smothered in swamp water.

A half mile on he turned sharply left again, and a shout went up from Harris, trailing closely, as the tug's light picked out a group of barges covered with dingy canvas.

His canoe spurted ahead, reaching the first barge thirty or forty yards in advance of the more cautious tug; and he leaped out upon it, swearing in savage triumph as a section of the rotten canvas came away in his hands, revealing a stack of rusting rails.

"Here she is!" he cried exultantly." Slap that attachment on her, Quist!"

The sheriff fumbled a document out of one of the pockets of his flapping coat. He looked at it helplessly. "What am I supposed to do with it?"

"Do anything you like, you fool! Do something! Here." Harris snatched the writ of attachment from him, spiked it raggedly upon a protruding rail end. Then he stooped to bring up a gun from the canoe.

"Don't come any closer, Craig," he said. "We're all deputies, sworn by Sheriff Quist to prevent this iron from being moved unlawfully, and we'll shoot anybody that tries to tie onto it."

CRAIG brought the tug in broadside to the barge. It rested there, its grouser pole swaying like a jury mast, listing heavily to port as all the twenty or thirty men aboard crowded to that side.

Mike Slane had brought up his rifle from the engine-room; a word from Craig would have discharged it and sent his crew surging over the side. But he did not give it. Instead, he lashed the wheel and walked over to the rail, facing Harris, who promptly brought his gun to bear upon him.

"You're being foolish, Harris," he said. He looked disparagingly at him, at the sheriff, the two breeds. All had guns, but only Harris seemed to have resolution enough to use them. "I've got men enough to throw you into this slough, with a rail tied to you to keep you down."

"Maybe. But you won't. You know better," answered Harris. He spoke confidently, with certainty. He knew men; he knew that if Craig had intended violence, he would not have stopped to talk.

Craig seemed to hesitate. He said slowly: "You talk of law, Harris, but by what right do you claim these rails? You've hardly looked at them. How do you know who they belong to?"

"I don't. And I'm not laying claim to them. I'm only attaching them so that their ownership can be determined by a court. If you have a claim, you can present it then."

Craig was silent another moment or two. Then he said: "Those rails belong to me, Harris. They were contracted to my road, shipped to it, and Stevenson has a moral, if not

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a legal obligation to let me have them at the original contract terms—ten percent down, the rest in two years. More than that, I've spent months in this hellish swamp locating them, because I've got to have them to complete my road."

"Tell that to the court. Tell it to Stevenson. I just work for him," said Harris.

He spoke with less truculence, but the muzzle of his gun did not waver. Obviously, he was not a man to be either blufled or cajoled. Slane said impatiently: "Don't palaver, Jeff. Say the word, an' I'll blow 'im into the river."

"No," said Craig. He stopped to think, went on slowly: "I'll do my fighting in court. Go below, and let's get started."

Slane stared at him with an incredulity that strengthened to a violent rage. "I'll be damned if I will! Jeff, if you ain't man enough to make a fight fer that iron, I'll do it myself!"

He made a movement to raise the gun. But Craig wrenched it out of his hands.

"Don't start anything, Mike," he said; quietly, but with authority. "I'm in command here. Either go below and take charge of that engine, or sit down and keep quiet."

Mike faced him a moment defiantly, then plumped himself down on a coil of cable." All right. I'll set down. I ain't havin' anything to do with this grouser unless it's towin' that iron behind it."

Craig told off another man to go below; and in the interval while they waited for him to get his bearings, Harris spoke across the tug rail:

"I don't know what you got in mind, Craig. Maybe you're only being sensible, which is fine; but if you got any notions about coming back, catching me off guard, you'd be wasting time. I'm camping right here until we get a tug up, to move this iron downriver."

"Camp where you like," Craig said. "Only don't get any notions of your own about molesting my supply barges back there under the dam—now or at any other time. It's your right to attach this iron, but nothing else. Remember that."

HE TOOK his place at the wheel, guided the tug deviously through the tamaracks back into the river. There he turned upstream. From time to time he glanced backward toward the lagoon they had left, vigilantly; and Durstine felt a similar watchful tension among others of the crew. One put his head into the cabin presently to point out to Craig, with satisfaction, a tongue of flame flickering fitfully above the tamaracks.

"They've built up a fire. Guess that means they're settlin' fer the night—won't do no lookin' around till mornin'."

"That's all the time we'll need—till morning," said Craig.

Obviously, Durstine perceived, something mysterious was in the wind. Slane seemed to have the same thought, for he got up off his coil of cable, hesitated, finally said gruffly: "Mebbe I was wrong, Jeff—flew off the handle too soon."

He looked sheepish, standing there; he glanced almost timidly at Craig's face.

"That's the best thing you could have done. It's exactly what I wanted you to do," Craig answered. "If you hadn't made such a scene, I might not have been so convincing; they might have followed us. We had to make them thinking they were getting something."

"*Gettin' ?*" Slane gaped. "Hell, they are! They're gettin' all them iron barges. I saw it with my own eyes."

"Did you?" said Craig. "Our eyes are peculiar organs, Mike. Often, we seem to see things that aren't there. Think back; think what you actually saw in that lagoon."

Slane sat down on a corner of the bunk behind the wheel. He took off his hat, moved his silky pink hair around. "Wal. It's kind o' hard to remember. I saw some barges—"

"How many?"

Mike pondered this. "A dozen, anyhow. Mebbe more. It was hard to tell; I didn't look good. They was all loaded with railroad iron. Leastwise, the first one was, when Harris ripped away that canvas—"

He jumped up, in sudden excitement. "Jeff, you ain't goin' to tell me none o' them other barges had iron on 'em!"

Two others did. They had around fifty tons apiece, laid on over a core of dead timber, like the first. But that was all the barges you saw back there, Mike—just three. The others you saw weren't there. They existed only in your imagination. You saw only what you'd been led to expect you'd see, as Harris did. And it never occurred to either of you to doubt the evidence of your own eyes."

Slane slumped down onto the bunk again. "Wal, I'll be dammed. Three barges—a hundred an' fifty tons of iron—an' I'd a swore I saw acres of it! Jeff, where's the rest?"

Craig put the wheel over, and the tug swung into the swamp again. It went on cautiously, deviously down another slough, pulling up finally before another long string of barges under dirty canvas. Craig inclined his head toward them.

"What do those look like, Mike?"

Slane answered slowly. "They look like barges. Twenty or thirty of 'em, loaded with rail iron. Looks like there might be six, seven thousand tons of it. But," he added hastily, "don't take my word for it. I wouldn't be sure till I'd see 'em all laid an' spiked. An' even then I might have doubts!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

RUN, TIGER

A fascinating short novel about Prince Mike of Kammorirri and the jungle battle that was fought to the wheezing music of a steam calliope.

By DONALD BARR CHIDSEY

Coming in next week's Argosy

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Starvation Island

Day after day, a chip or a sliver at a time, he cut away at the tough trunk—and remembered his waiting meal

Dinner's waiting for you, woodsman, at the top of a tree. Keep it in mind while you pull your belt tighter, chipping away at your only chance of salvation. But just remember that a meal can walk away

By Jim Kjelgaard

Author of "All Wool and a River Wide," "Empire Before Him," etc.

THE FIRST thing Carl Johnson was aware of when he opened his eyes was the sound of rushing water on both sides of him. He raised his head and stared out across the Wolverene Rapids.

White-fanged and angry, the river that lashed at the tiny island was an insane thing. Immense rocks, that looked oddly black against the white water, were plentifully spaced through it. Johnson shivered in wet clothes, and moaned as the utter hopelessness of his situation was driven home to him.

Running the rapids, his canoe had hit a rock and broken in two. Johnson had been swept down the river into a quiet eddy, and just before losing consciousness had managed to drag himself up on the island.

He moaned again and buried his face in his hands. There was no hope of rescue or escape. A man could not swim through that wild water to the river bank. And Johnson was the only trapper who traveled this river. Moose hunters came up it in the fall, but this was spring.

The island was a bleak, barren place about three hundred yards long by a hundred feet wide at its widest. Two dozen pine trees were scattered over it, and it was carpeted with willow brush. But there was no food on the island. No animal could live there.

The full import of that struck him with all the force of a smashing, staggering blow. Three times in his career as a northland trapper and prospector he had come across the bodies of men who had starved to death, and had known no emotion except pity as he buried them. But now there flashed before him a vivid panorama of all the agonies those other men must have endured. He remembered their thin faces, the set of their mouths.

His fixed, desperate gaze fastened on a pine tree that leaned out over the river, and mchanically traveled out each limb. Suddenly a tremulous little quiver that was born neither of fear nor of the cold swept through him.

Ten feet off the ground a stolid porcupine crouched complacently on a limb. A year ago, as a baby, the porcupine had been snatched up by a great horned owl and dropped here on the island when his lashing tail had filled the owl with quills.

The sight jarred Johnson from an abnormal, desolate world back into a normal one. Being alone on the island inspired fearful thoughts. But sharing it with the porcupine made it a perfectly normal and entirely feasible thing.

Instead of heart-numbing despair because he was on the island, it occurred to Johnson that he was very fortunate

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to be there instead of hammered to a pulp in the Wolverene Rapids. He laughed out loud, and laughed again just to hear the sound of his own voice. His eager gaze remained fixed on the porcupine.

ALWAYS before it had seemed to him that porcupines were stupid, ugly creatures. But now he thought that this one possessed a grace and appeal he had never noticed in any other animal. There was the assured way it clung to its precarious perch. The long black hairs on its back seemed a perfect foil for its gray quills. Its soft black muzzle, oddly similar to that of a horse, seemed fashioned of sheerest velvet.

Then there was its admirable adaptability. Living on bark, the porcupine was the only animal that could eke out an existence on the island.

Johnson laughed again. Being face to face with certain starvation was a ghastly thing. Being only hungry, but knowing that he could eat any time he chose, lent a new aspect to the situation.

It ocurred to him that his status had not changed materially. He was still on the island and could not be rescued. At the most the porcupine would weigh twenty-five pounds, and a third of that would be skin and bones. He certainly could not subsist indefinitely on sixteen and a half pounds of edible flesh.

But those thoughts, even when weighed very carefully, assumed minor importance. He *could* eat.

For a short space he was tempted to climb the tree and catch the porcupine right now. But he thought better of that. Undoubtedly he could go many days without eating anything at all, and would need the porcupine much worse than he needed it now. He was absolutely confident that he could catch the porcupine any time he chose because he knew that porcupines were easy to catch.

The sun had dried his clothing, and he was no longer chilled. He walked down to the edge of the river and plunged his hands into his trousers pocket. His right hand encountered something hard, and his fingers curled around and drew out a clasp knife with one three-inch blade and a broken smaller blade. Johnson remembered that he had put the knife in his pocket yesterday morning, after cleaning some trout.

One by one he went through the rest of his pockets for whatever of value might be in them. But all he found was a penny.

He started jauntily down the island. There was something of defiance in the gesture, but there was also something else. He didn't quite trust himself. He was feeling much better, and with returning physical well-being came added hunger. If he stayed where he could watch the porcupine, he knew that he would be unable to resist climbing the tree and getting it. He had to be where he could not see it and the other end of the island was the farthest away he could get.

Reaching the island's opposite end, he stared downriver. The water was not so swift here, though it was entirely too swift to permit a man's swimming to either bank. Where the island split the river, the right channel flowed straight. But the left one curled about the island and descended a considerable incline. It shot into the right branch, and a strong current flowed on a slanting line toward the right bank. There was a little pool of calm water at the very tip of the island.

Johnson watched the river until dark. Then he went to a big pine twenty feet back from the water's edge. Kicking a pile of dry pine needles together, he lay on them and slept.

WHEN MORNING came he was very, very hungry. He tried to think of many things: animals he had trapped, dogs he had driven, bears and moose he had shot, and his various escapades among the girls of the northland towns. But he could not turn his mind away from the porcupine in the tree.

He knew that he must. He had been only twenty-four hours without food and certainly was not weakening yet. The porcupine had to be kept until he was vitally needed, until he could no longer walk without stagering.

Again he fell to studying the current formed where the two branches of the river met. It seemed to throw itself straight at the right-hand bank and fall back from there.

Suddenly wildly excited, Johnson ran back to the big pine under which he had slept. He brought the heel of his right shoe up and down on a dead snag until the snag broke. Johnson picked it up, leaned one end against a rock, and jumped up and down on it until it broke again.

With the point of his knife blade he bored a hole in each end of the two pieces of wood. Cutting a green branch from the pine, he trimmed the needles off and slashed it in two. The two sticks were fitted into the holes he had bored, so that the two pieces of dead pine were about a foot apart with the branches holding them there.

He cut a slender willow stick, eighteen inches long, and lashed it to one of the crosspieces with strips torn from his shirt. He tied another piece of shirt on top of the willow stick, carried the miniature catamaran down to the quiet pool at the foot of the island, and launched it. It floated perfectly, with the willow stick upright. Johnson gave it a shove out into the current and sat breathlessly back on the island's tip.

The tiny vessel was whisked down the river. But the piece of shirt on top of the willow wand still fluttered bravely. Scarcely five feet from the right bank, the flag disappeared in a sudden dash of spray. But when the spray subsided the flag waved high on the bank.

Johnson stared at it. If a man had something to cling to, something that would buoy him up, he would be cast on the bank just as the little catamaran had been. But there was not a single piece of driftwood on the island.

HE TURNED to look at the pine. Twenty inches through at the base, the pine was thirty feet high. With his eye Johnson measured it to its first branch, a dozen feet from the ground. If he had that twelve feet of the pine's trunk he could ride it to safety. But he had only the knife to cut it with.

Without food even attempting such a job would be hopeless. Starvation would conquer him before he was half finished.

But he had food! When hunger made him weak, he could eat the porcupine and renew his strength. Trembling, he sank down by the pine's roots. He would try it. He had to try it: it was his only chance! And he would not catch the porcupine until he could no longer do without something to eat.

He opened the knife and began whittling on the pine. Hour after hour he worked patiently.

When he was so weary that he could no longer stay awake, he slipped his hand into the four-inch cut he had

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made. Worriedly he ran his finger along the knife blade. It was dull, but the knife was made of the best tempered steel—had cost him eight dollars at a trading post—and would not wear easily. He would wait to sharpen it, he decided, until it was so dull that it would not cut another chip. By so doing he would be able to make it last as long as possible.

He put the knife in his pocket and lay down to sleep. His hands in back of his head, for a while he thought of the porcupine, reconstructing in his mind exactly how he was going to skin it, the precise way he would clean and disjoint it, and the portions the would eat first. Of course he would have to eat it raw. But raw meat was good. He had eaten it before.

He slept all night and awoke to a ravenous hunger. For a few minutes he sat with his back against the tree trunk, staring down the river. He had never been without food before, and had considered the possibility of being without it only in a vaguely detached way. But a trapper who had suffered near starvation had told him that the second or third day was the worst. After that hunger did not grow any keener.

Johnson wondered seriously if that was true. Could he trust another's experience now? Or should he be guided by his own desire that, in spite of his intention to conserve the porcupine, told him to get and eat it now?

He would wait, he decided, see what today and tomorrow brought. His hunger wasn't unbearable. If he retained control of his physical and mental faculties he could get along without food. But the instant he felt his strength slipping, or thought himself no longer the master of his mind, he would get the porcupine.

The knife in his hand, he squatted by the tree and gravely set to work enlarging the cut he had started. A sliver or a chip at a time, he took out the sticky, pitch-damp wood and added the bits to the pile at his feet.

For six more days he knelt or squatted beside the tree, cutting it down a bit at a time, sharpening his knife when it grew too dull to cut, and always thinking of the porcupine. In the middle of the seventh day, cut three-quarters through, the tree came crashing down.

A WONDERFUL elation and a mighty sense of triumph swept through Johnson. Now at last he could catch and eat the porcupine. But almost immediately his happiness was quenched by a sobering thought.

He still had the other end of the log to cut off. It was impossible for one man to move the whole tree into the river. Johnson walked twelve feet up the pine and stood on the trunk staring down at it. The trunk was only fourteen inches in diameter here; but cutting it through would take nearly as long as cutting it through at the base had taken because he would have to sever every strand of wood. The standing tree had fallen when it was three-quarters cut.

Johnson stared up the island toward the porcupine tree. But his fingers curled about the handle of the knife, the blade of which was almost half worn away. Suppose he killed the porcupine now, then came back and started cutting on the tree, and the knife broke? Suppose he was forced to resort to the infinitely slow process of wearing the tree away with the sharp corners of stones and had no food in reserve?

He shuddered. He was still strong and had full command of his mind. But the knowledge that the porcupine was where he could get it was the biggest factor in keeping him that way.

Seized with a sudden eagerness, he thrust the point of his knife into a strip of bark and pried it loose. The mighty disappointment he had known because he could not yet have his prize began to fade away. The porcupine would taste twice as good after he had made this cut too.

Early on the morning of the twelfth day he cut through the last wood fibers and the log was free. Johnson knelt behind it and rolled it over. Again he rolled it, and again, until one more turn would take it into the quiet pool at the foot of the island.

Placing stones under the log to prevent its rolling accidently into the river, Johnson sat down on it. His hand was trembling and he was very dizzy. But the dizziness passed and he stood up. His eyes glittered and his mouth filled with saliva. A happy smile trembled on his lips. Now, at last, he could eat. There was no longer reason for not getting the porcupine.

He ran to the head of the island, came to the place where he had seen the porcupine, and stopped short. The tree, with a few strong roots holding it to the bank, had been undermined by the river and now lay with the water rushing over it. Green shoots of grass were springing up in the gaping hole the tree had left.

The leaning pine had been down for several days; perhaps it had fallen on the very day Johnson left it. Undoubtedly the porcupine had been washed away.

Johnson's knees trembled. A moan of despair broke from his lips. His body shook violently.

Then reason asserted itself and he began to laugh. He was still laughing when he launched the log and rode it down the river, to be cast up on the right bank where a few hours' walk would bring him to a trading post.

PEANUTS TO YOU

A hilarious story of a homerun king whose heart was in his stomach.

By WILLIAM R. COX

Coming in next week's Argosy

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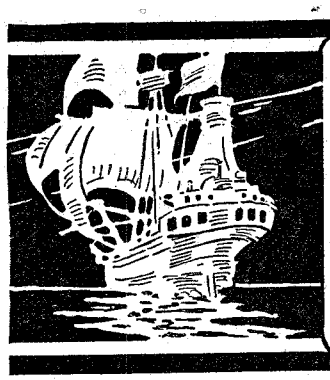

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

POSSIBLY you are a trifle weary of hearing about ballistics in these columns. We have tried our best to escape from that abstruse and frightening subject, but it's no good; we've got to have another go at the targets.

The sad story is that apparently we have messed things up for one of our firearms experts. In our wool-witted, fumbling, bumbling way we failed to correct certain typographical errors in the proof of a letter from Mr. F. J. Leslie, and naturally enough he has written in to correct us. Where he said "feet" it somehow turned out "inches" —a horrible blunder. We lay the blame to that pixie Hamilcar who lives in this office; he is a quaint little creature, but he has no head for figures.

Mr. Leslie is very nice about it, only hinting that we ought to get hold of a good handbook or else join the Army. Well, we'll get the handbook, which we probably won't understand; but if we went in the Army the chances are that we'd throw it into a state of riotous confusion and be arrested for sabotage.

To Mr. Leslie, our apologies. Here's what he really meant.

F. J. LESLIE

My, my, I must write again concerning two mistakes either you or I made in the letter you printed. This shooting business is getting funny. Especially the highly entertaining comments you make on same.

In case someone kicks about this printing error, I hastily make correction. First, the .220 Swift loses 650 *feet* per second in the first 100 yards from muzzle velocity, and not *inches* as was printed. Second, the 500-yard and 600-yard target has a 20-inch black aiming bull and is 6 *feet* by 6 *feet* square, not 6x6 *inches* as printed.

The science of ballistics takes some study.

There is internal ballistics, which is chiefly valuable to the police, and there is external ballistics, dealing with the flight of the bullet after it leaves the barrel. You can get much useful information, if you and your authors are interested, from the leading ammunition companies. Send to the Winchester Repeating Arms Co. or the Western Cartridge Co. for their ammunition handbook.

If you want to learn to shoot, the Army does a pretty good job of teaching. I think they also have a handbook on the fundamentals of shooting, such as the different positions taken when firing, correct breathing, aiming, and trigger squeeze. However, ammunition handbooks teach both shooting and ballistics.

You can get into a lot of bad habits in shooting without proper instruction, but you should be able to get from these two books all the information generally necessary for average shooting outside of highly competitive target work.

Thanks for printing my stuff anyhow.

Indianapolis, Ind.

THE next letter also deals with ballistics, but in a very different fashion. This correspondent does not possess the scientific mind any more than we do; and the firearms debate has confused him no end. So he sends us his sympathy, which we gratefully accept, heartened to find that we are not alone in our bewilderment.

R. W. STRINGER

I feel very sorry for you. I have been reading the letters on ballistics printed in Argonotes, and I can't blame you a bit for being confused. Friend, I'm confused, too!

I had a B—B gun once, but since that time I haven't had anything to do with firearms. The state of the world being what it is now, maybe we'll all have to learn the things you experts talk about. We can try, but it looks pretty tough to me, especially since the experts disagree with each other. Which one is right, anyhow? (Sorry, I shouldn't have asked that. You wouldn't know.)

You probably need some cheering up, so let me tell you that the stories in ARGOSY are just as good as they always were—which is fine. The ones I liked best recently were "Shake Hands with Old Hickory" by Theodore Roscoe, "Drums of Khartoum" by E. Hoffmann Price, and "The Devil Let Loose" by Gordon Keyne. Some of Roscoe's president stories were not up to his very best, but he certainly did a swell job with Old Hickory. I learned more about him from that story than I ever did in high school.

Keep up the good work, and don't get too worried about ballistics. Everybody can't be an expert.

New York, N. Y.

APPARENTLY ARGOSY readers like to know the men who write for them. For here is another note in praise of "Men Who Make the Argosy." We are glad to learn that the department is so popular.

RICHARD GARADO

I want to tell you how glad I am that you have revived "Men Who Make the ARGOSY." I can remember the department back in the old days, and always thought that it was one of the best features of the magazine.

The biographies that have appeared so far in the new series are fine. Here's a suggestion: To date, you have been talking mostly about your newer writers. Maybe it would be a good idea to republish some of the biographies of the older writers who are still appearing in ARGOSY.

A lot of readers have written in to praise Jack Byrne's "Gunswift." I agree with them: that was one of the most exciting Western stories I have ever read. You can't do better than publish some more Westerns by Mr. Byrne.

Worcester, Mass.

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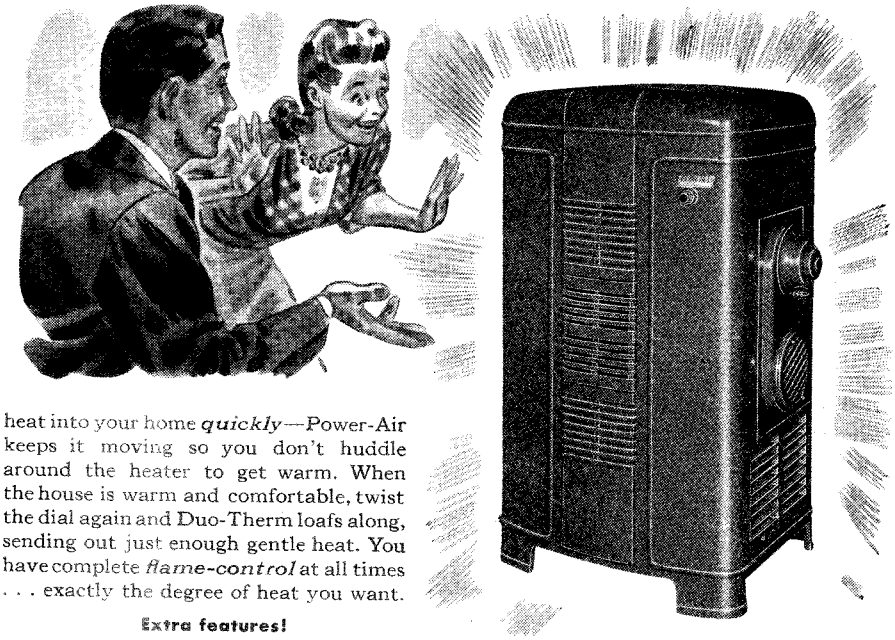

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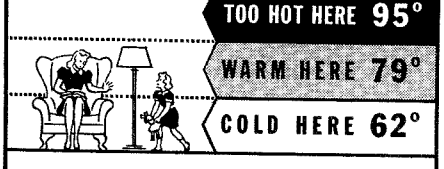

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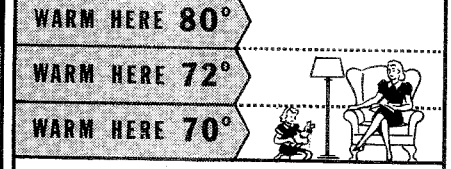

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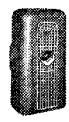

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Send me, without obligation, complete information about Duo-Therm heaters. I am also interested in Duo-Therm *Furnaces* ☐ . . . *Water Heaters* ☐ . . . *Trailer Heaters* ☐ . . . *Ranges* ☐

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